Final touches put on airport master plan

By BOBBY LAMB
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An advisory committee put its final touches Monday on a 20-year master plan that calls for a $219 million expansion at Baton Rouge’s Metropolitan Airport.

The LPA Group, an airport consulting firm from Tampa, Fla., will be making final corrections and changes to its draft document over the next few weeks, based on the recommendations of the advisory committee comprised of airport, city-parish and chamber of commerce officials and the mayors of Baker, Zachary and Baton Rouge.

Meanwhile, a public hearing regarding the environmental impact of the proposed plan is scheduled for 7 p.m. July 30 at the St. Pius Elementary School gymnasium.

Once completed, the master plan will be presented to the airport district commission and city-parish Metro Council, then submitted to the Federal Aviation Administration, said Iray LeDoux, aviation director for the airport.

Under the plan, the airport would expand its existing passenger terminal within the next three years, pending the anticipated construction of a new terminal complex between 1994 and 1998 to meet increasing demand. Meanwhile, the airport would acquire the land over the next few years necessary to build a new runway in 1999 parallel to and
northeast of the airport's existing main northwest/southeast runway.

The plan estimates that passenger boardings will increase by 46 percent from 393,084 enplanements in 1988 to 574,600 in 1994 and to 727,300 by 1999. Boardings are projected at 1,079,500 by 2009.

The new 8,200-foot runway would require that the airport acquire 432 acres of surrounding land and relocate 632 residences in the Sharon Hills area to meet safety and noise guidelines. It also calls for the rerouting of Plank Road.

The proposal already has triggered demands for a study that would examine alternate sites for commercial and general aviation. Airport officials have submitted an application requesting up to $600,000 for the study.

Livingston and West Baton Rouge parishes have emerged as potential sites, although opposition already is being voiced in those parishes.

Gloria Nye, who represents general aviation on the advisory committee, said LPA had done good work on the 20-year plan. However, she reiterated a complaint that the firm should have held more working meetings with the committee and outside observers to foster community support for the plan.

LPA's Paul Pucklie said the firm went beyond the required six meetings in its contract to hold more than a dozen local meetings to give local groups ample input on the plan.

Byron Melius, manager of the air traffic control tower, said parallel runways would be a great improvement over the intersecting runways at the airport. It would give the airport individual runways for commercial and general aviation traffic as long as congestion is not a problem. The new runway also would reduce the commercial use of the airport's southwest/northeast runway.

Melius said the air traffic control tower will either have to be relocated or built twice as tall at its current location.

An airport master plan is required by the FAA for the funding of projects. All the projects contained in the 1980 20-year master plan for Ryan Field have been completed.

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