

PDK Watch

The purpose of PDK Watch is to protect and assure the future of our established residential neighborhoods and quality of life in the area affected by PDK Airport.

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For Immediate Release

DEKALB TAXPAYERS NOT WELL-SERVED BY PDK COST-BENEFIT STUDY

PDK Watch, a coalition of neighborhood groups, notes the following serious flaws in the Cost-Benefit Study of DeKalb-Peachtree (PDK) Airport recently completed by RKG Associates of Durham, New Hampshire:

1. The fiscal benefit-to-cost ratio of 7 to 1 presented in the report on page 1-6 is incorrect. That ratio completely ignores the \$75,000,000 costs for the buyout and soundproofing of residential areas most seriously impacted by airport noise, a program that DeKalb County has committed itself to undertaking. Inclusion of the buyout and soundproofing costs would give a negative benefit-to-cost ratio of 0.6 to 1, or, simply stated, for each dollar invested in PDK only sixty cents comes back to the general revenue fund.

2. The cost-benefit study assumes the value of airport property at \$60,000 per acre (page 6-7). However, land surrounding the airport is currently selling at between \$200,000 and \$400,000 per acre for recent development projects. As only one example, DeKalb County recently paid more than \$200,000 per acre to buy property immediately adjacent to the airport. These sales figures in the hundreds of thousands for land surrounding the airport could be expected to rise much higher if this prime real estate within the perimeter and adjacent to MARTA were not negatively impacted by the existing airport use. The study's failure to use realistic land values seriously reduces its credibility.

3. Although the RFP for the cost-benefit study specified that the highest and best use of PDK airport land should be calculated, the RKG study focused on possible industrial and single family use for the airport (page 6-8) rather than on the more economically productive possibilities for commercial and multiple family use. The DeKalb CEO and Chamber of Commerce are aggressively attempting to develop the commercial potential of the International Village bordering the airport, and there is new commercial (not industrial) construction throughout the area. Ignoring the more productive commercial possibilities for development in the area contradicts the Chamber of Commerce goal of making the Village a destination for commercial, residential, and recreational activity.

4. The study states that the nearly 800-acre airport directly supports 762 on-site jobs, or approximately one job per acre (page 3-1), and directly or indirectly contributes to 7,357 jobs in DeKalb County (page 3-2). These numbers pale, however, in comparison to the jobs that could be produced by alternative use. For example, just one nearby office building bordering the airport--the new IRS building--will employ more than 3,200 persons. One could easily envision new developments similar to nearby Century Center that could generate far more jobs than the airport now purportedly supports.

5. The study indicates that the districts identified as Chamblee-Buford Highway, Doraville, and Northlake/Lakeside have lagged behind the region in terms of residential sales (page 5-15) The Dunwoody area near PDK has underperformed the larger Dunwoody neighborhood (page 5-16). Those who live in the surrounding area have suffered a loss of \$67.6 million (page 5-18). One would think that such evidence would encourage DeKalb County's administration to take steps to control further airport growth. However, at the March 5 public hearing for the cost-benefit study, the consultant referred to these problems as "isolated pockets" that presumably could be ignored.

6. Despite the negative airport impacts identified in this study, airport and county administration are now laying the groundwork for further expansion of the airport. PDK Director Lee Rimmel has proposed, for example, to change the County Comprehensive Plan to redefine PDK Airport as a state and regional resource rather than as a county airport, as it now exists. This change would encourage further airport growth on existing property and on land to be acquired in the future. Rimmel's immediate plans call for expansion of the airport onto land being bought out for noise abatement purposes and for the installation on that land of two 20-unit T-hangers on the Clairmont Road area. This contradicts current county policy that new property acquired by PDK Airport shall not be used for further expansion of airport operations.

7. Proposals for airport expansion presented in the study are deeply disturbing to those who are committed to a positive and vital relationship between residential and commercial development in DeKalb County. Four expansion scenarios can be found in Appendix L of the study. Each can be completed individually to expand the airport incrementally. The study does not consider the additional negative impact such expansion would produce.

In conclusion, it is clear that this misleading cost-benefit study is a seriously flawed document that cannot be relied upon in making sound economic policy decisions regarding PDK Airport or the surrounding community.

For further information on the problems with the Cost-Benefit Study, contact Larry Foster, President, Hawthorne Civic Association, 678-637-9227.