

# Aurora sues to prevent airport master plan from being finalized

By Bill Poehler, Salem Statesman Journal, April 21, 2024



*Air Traffic Control Tower at Aurora State Airport. Kevin Neri, Statesman Journal*

The city of Aurora has sued the Oregon Aviation Department to prevent the state from submitting a master plan for the Aurora State Airport to the Federal Aviation Administration for approval.

The city argues in its lawsuit filed in Marion County Circuit Court that Oregon's land use processes would be bypassed if the master plan is approved by the FAA and adopted by the Oregon Aviation Board.

“The Aviation Board and the Department of Aviation don’t seem to want a land use review, as it may interfere with their assurance to the FAA that the master plan complies with local zoning requirements,” Aurora Mayor Brian Asher said in a statement.

Asher served on the Public Advisory Committee for the master plan, estimated at \$185 million to implement.

At the advisory committee’s last public meeting on Feb. 11, Oregon Department of Aviation staff members said they intended to submit the final draft of the master plan to the FAA but did not specify when.

The city of Aurora is suing the Oregon Department of Aviation to prevent the agency from finalizing a master plan for the Aurora State Airport.

### **Lawsuit seeks to stop aviation department from making plan official**

Aurora State Airport, located north of Aurora in northern Marion County, is the third-busiest airport in Oregon, trailing Portland International Airport and Hillsboro Airport, with about 64,000 flights a year.

The master plan is a 20-year planning document that guides development for the airport. The state has been working on it since 2021. It includes the airport layout plan, which the state aviation department submitted to the FAA on April 2.

If the FAA approves the master plan, the aviation department still needs to sign off.

Aurora was among the parties that sued the aviation department in 2019 over an earlier airport master plan. The Oregon Court of Appeals ruled in 2023 that the master plan is a land use decision and must comply with state land use procedures.

The lawsuit filed April 9 argues that state law requires the aviation department to coordinate with other governments like Marion County, to ensure that laws are compliant with state law.

Aurora has asked for an injunction to prevent the aviation department from signing the airport layout plan before the master plan is adopted by the Oregon Aviation Board.

Sections of Oregon Route 551 would need to be rerouted to the west where there are some residences under an airport layout plan the Oregon Department of Aviation submitted this month to the FAA.

### **Aurora State Airport layout plan released**

The airport’s designation in the layout plan is changed from C-II to D-II. That means it is designated for use by larger airplanes, such as 50-seat corporate jets.

It was the first mention of Aurora State Airport being changed to a D-II airport, said Ben Williams, president of the land use group Friends of French Prairie and a member of the advisory committee.

“It was never mentioned” at any of the advisory committee meetings about the airport master plan, Williams said.

The layout plan also designated the drain fields for sewer systems south and north of the runway as “improve to meet FAA standards or remove.”

The drain fields had been marked for removal in previous versions of the layout plan. That meant the users of those drain fields would have been forced to move them.

The submitted land use plan includes the state acquiring aprons in front of hangars, a portion of property to the southeast of the runway for relocating Keil Road, moving Highway 551 to the west and acquiring residential properties across the highway from the airport.

*Bill Poehler covers Marion and Polk County for the Statesman Journal.*