

FAA agrees to new traffic pattern over Aurora Airport

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by: SPOKESMAN PHOTO: JOSH KULLA - Jets at the Aurora State Airport are a double-edged sword for local residents, some of whom use them to commute in and out of town. New traffic patterns now will bring jets into the airport from the east instead of the north.

The Federal Aviation Administration recently announced that its Portland Traffic Control Center has agreed to a new route for air traffic arriving at Aurora State Airport.

According to a statement released Oct. 30 by advocacy group Positive Aurora Aviation Management, the FAA's air traffic controllers, or TRACON, will now separate inbound Aurora air traffic before flights are grouped in with northern airspace traffic. This will result in Aurora-bound craft flying south of Mount Hood and approaching the airport from the east instead of the north.

Positive Aurora Aviation Management has been working with the FAA's Portland office for years on a number of issues, including the contentious matter of noise generated by inbound and outbound aircraft, jets in particular.

According to PAAM, the new arrival routing will enhance safety as well as reduce noise, operating times and pollution.

The agreement also coincides with Oregon Aviation Appreciation Month.

Currently, air traffic arriving at Aurora starts off with other aircraft inbound for Portland, Troutdale or other metro destinations. Existing air traffic control practices brings all the traffic in through a "virtual funnel" east of Hood River.

Planes are directed down the Columbia River Gorge to Portland.

It is at this point, when planes already are over Portland, that TRACON separates out the Aurora-bound traffic. It is sent south over Portland, Lake Oswego, Tualatin, Wilsonville and Charbonneau, before reaching the Aurora Airport.

According to PAAM, separating out this traffic before it arrives over Portland increases safety by reducing air traffic controller workloads.

In relative terms, Portland International Airport dwarfs all others in the state in terms of traffic. By comparison, Aurora State Airport is the third busiest airport in Oregon, with a sizable number of pleasure and corporate aircraft based there. It also sees a relatively high number of business travelers because of its proximity to Portland, Salem and Interstate 5.

"Overall," said PAAM Safety Committee Chairman and Aurora Aviation owner Bruce Bennett, "the new routing of Aurora-bound aircraft through the 'saddle' rather than down the gorge is a win for all involved — controllers, the people of Portland, Lake Oswego, Tualatin, Wilsonville and Charbonneau as well as the environment."