

January 27, 2003

Mr. Earnest Williams, Chair  
Members of City Council  
City of St. Petersburg  
P.O. Box 2842  
St. Petersburg, FL 33731

Dear Mr. Williams and Members of City Council:

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) is a nonprofit membership association consisting of over 390,000 pilots and aircraft owners nationwide, 28,705 who reside in the state of Florida. AOPA is committed to ensuring the continued viability, growth, and development of aviation and airports in Florida and the United States.

This letter is to provide the City Council with the Association's concerns with the single runway plan proposed by Mayor Rick Baker for Albert Whitted Field (SPG). We are strongly opposed to closing Runway 6/24. Doing so will have drastic effects on the safety, efficiency and utilization of the airport by our members and the rest of the flying public. We understand that the City Council has given the Mayor six months and \$80,000 to conduct a study of his plan. We would expect that if the study disproves the plan's feasibility City Council would then adopt the Airport Master Plan provided by LPA Group, Inc. that had previously been accepted.

Both runways are necessary to provide the desired wind coverage as indicated on the current Federal Aviation Administration approved Airport Layout Plan dated March 22, 1994. The FAA defines wind coverage as "that percent of time crosswind components are below an acceptable velocity. The desirable wind coverage for an airport is 95 percent, based on the total numbers of weather observations"<sup>1</sup> The all-weather wind coverage of Runway 6/24 at 10.5 knots is 93.7%, for Runway 18/36 it is 92.2%. Both runways are necessary for the airport to meet the FAA's desired wind coverage of 95% computed on the basis of the crosswind not exceeding 10.5 knots for Airport Reference Code B-I,<sup>2</sup> which is the current designation for SPG.

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<sup>1</sup> Advisory Circular 150/5100-13 Airport Design, Federal Aviation Administration, Appendix 1, paragraph 3, page 87.

<sup>2</sup> Airport Reference Codes (ARC) as defined in AC 150/5100-13, Airport Design, are used to relate airport design criteria to the operational and physical characteristics of the airplanes intended to operate at the airport. B-I would consist of airplanes with an approach speed of 91 knots or more but less than 121 knots and that have a wingspan of 49 feet up to but not including 79 feet. An airplane representative of this

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Pilots will typically seek out airports with multiple runways to minimize the effects of crosswinds during takeoffs and landings. An analysis of NTSB accident reports shows that 55% of accidents occur during the takeoff and landing phase of flight. In 2000 there were 400 total landing accidents, of those “the category with the largest number of landing accidents (79 of 400) were caused by ‘loss of control on landing in crosswind/gust/tailwind conditions.’”<sup>3</sup> An AOPA Air Safety Foundation 10 year analysis of takeoff and landing incidents reveals that wind conditions are in the top five leading accident causes, playing a role in 8.5% of takeoff accidents and 17.2% landing accidents.<sup>4</sup> By increasing the pilot’s exposure to crosswind conditions by closing Runway 6/24, the accident rates could climb higher than they should be.

In a recent survey conducted by AOPA and our Airport Support Network Volunteer at SPG, Mr. Jack Tunstill, 71% of the respondents indicated that they used Runway 6/24 and only 29% indicated that they used Runway 18/36. Since there is an operating control tower at SPG from 7 a.m. until 9 p.m. runway assignment is usually made by the air traffic controllers, taking into account prevailing winds and other flight operations being conducted at the airport. Ninety five percent of survey respondents indicated that the control tower had given them their runway assignment with 94% of assignments most aligned with the prevailing wind. A summary of the survey is enclosed with this letter.

Here are some of the 69 additional comments by airport users from the survey:

*“As a current ultralight trainer pilot and instructor and with the proposed Light Sport Aircraft, it is a great concern to me to have a local airport that would be available to fly to/from but would have a single runway not parallel to prevailing winds. In a lot of cases regarding Light Sport Aircraft class, the prevailing winds could create a crosswind component that could very easily exceed the maximum safe crosswind component of the given LSA. Dual (sic) runways would drastically decrease the chances of having an unsafe wind angle and hopefully help avoid wind related accidents in Light Sport Aircraft and other lighter experimental and general aviation aircraft.”*

*“I would be concerned about the ability of proper student training should we lose the ability to ‘land into the wind’ this may actually increase accidents. If Albert Whitted increases accidents, then closing the entire airport would be next. To save accidents and possibly lives we need to maintain an airport that has been part of our history in St. Petersburg and keep it safe by having the current options.”*

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category is a Beech King Air B-100, which is also designated as the “critical aircraft” for SPG. The critical aircraft is the most demanding aircraft expected to use the airport.

<sup>3</sup> 2001 Nall Report, General Aviation Accident Trends and Factors for 2000, AOPA Air Safety Foundation, page 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ups and Downs of Takeoffs and Landings, AOPA Air Safety Foundation, page 4.

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This comment was made on several surveys:

*“If the winds are from the west, landing on Runway 36 is made difficult by the wind bouncing over and around the U.S. Coast Guard buildings just west of the end of the runway.”*

*“The prevailing wind favors Runway 6 and development is not an excuse for compromising safety.”*

As can be seen, the local users of Albert Whitted Field are very concerned with losing Runway 6/24. Fully 80% of the airport users surveyed indicated that they had concerns with crosswind operations under the mayor’s proposed plan. Fifty percent of survey respondents said that their use of the airport would be affected with 14% being unable to use the airport due to aircraft performance limitations.

AOPA does not see a benefit to civil aviation through the closure of Runway 6/24. We strongly encourage the City Council to keep the existing airport layout and approve the airport master plan update that was previously accepted for implementation.

The Association appreciates your consideration of our views. If my staff or I can be of any further assistance on this issue or any other issues related to Albert Whitted Airport please contact me at 301-695-2200 or via e-mail at [anne.esposito@aopa.org](mailto:anne.esposito@aopa.org).

Sincerely,

Anne J. Esposito  
Vice President, Airports  
Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association

cc:

Mr. Dean Stringer, Manager FAA Orlando Airports District Office  
Mr. Kenneth Hartmenn, P.E., FDOT District 7 Secretary  
Senator Jim Sebesta, Chairman Florida Senate Transportation Committee  
Ms. Sheri Weaver, Airport Manager  
Mr. Nelson Rhodes, AOPA Regional Representative  
Mr. Jack Tunstill, AOPA ASN Volunteer for SPG