

An editorial

Decision is needed on reliever airport

If the state Legislature does nothing else of major importance this year, it should at least make a clear decision on a site for a general aviation reliever airport on Oahu.

Yet the danger is that once again the Legislature will fail to act, with its members divided, failing to appreciate the urgency of the issue, or taking refuge in unviable alternatives.

THIS IS one of those issues where it is easiest for lawmakers to do nothing. They can rationalize they are saving money. They avoid antagonizing constituents, except the minority involved in general aviation.

Yet the need — and the dangers of a mid-air collision or other disaster — are clear.

General aviation, which is really more business than pleasure flying, is growing. That will continue and could not legally be stopped if we wanted it to be.

At the same time, the lethal mix of jetliners, military planes and smaller and slower general aviation aircraft at Honolulu International Airport portends a tragedy bound to happen eventually.

There has been some relief in airport traffic recently due to the air controllers' strike and the national recession's effect on tourism. But that is temporary. The congestion will start growing again.

Now is the time we should be dealing with the problem — and the choices will never get easier.

AS WE HAVE noted before, there are no really good choices, only realistic possibilities and a tough decision to make.

To their credit, Governor Ariyoshi and his administration have tried, here and in Washington, for other alternatives and decided to again recommend Poamoho in Central Oahu.

So has the state Senate transportation committee headed by Senator Mary George, and Oahu Republican backing a Democratic governor on an issue she stresses should not involve partisan politics.

Moreover, Senator George has writ-

ten a nine-page committee report that discusses the alternatives and explains why Poamoho is the best of these now and for the foreseeable future. Some points it stresses:

- Now under the Reagan administration as under others before, the Defense Department continues to rule out joint use on any military airfield, including Bellows Air Force Base at Waimanalo.

"Continuing to identify Bellows (or Wheeler, or Barbers Point, or Kaneohe) as 'available' serves only as an exercise in wishful thinking; an impediment to getting down to the busi-

ness of picking a site for a reliever airport that is within the state's capability to acquire and develop."

- Modifying Honolulu International is not a realistic alternative.

"Airport planners and users assure us that flight patterns and HIA operations cannot simply be readjusted to accommodate an increase in operations. They say the \$20 million projected cost of a new reliever airport "would look like small change" compared to the costs of modifying HIA.

- Because of dangers now, physical restraints on other locations, and the alternatives likely into the foreseeable

future, a decision needs to be made now on a site for a new airport, and it should be made by the Legislature. A variety of studies, views expressed at hearings and other factors narrow the choice to two possible sites: Waipio Peninsula and Poamoho.

- Waipio has attractions of access and convenience to users, and the fact it would take less cane land. But against it are air-space conflicts with present airfields, the number of housing units nearby, problems with a bird sanctuary, the possible need for land exchanges, and the fact it might move into an irrigation runoff area and a



Collision course

blast zone from an ammunition storage area which the Navy says can't be reduced.

The report said the committee "concluded that the problems connected with the Waipio site are greater in number and more serious in nature than proponents of this location have realized."

- Factors for Poamoho include these points: There are relatively few nearby residents who might be disturbed by noise. There is room for later expansion, but meantime some cane land taken could be leased back for continuing agricultural use.

While it is remote, the site fits in the FAA's criterion of within "reasonable surface travel time" for potential users, something important legally if the state wants make present users at Honolulu International relocate to the new airport. (Dillingham Field does not fit that criterion, the report says.)

SOME WILL BE unhappy with the Senate committee report, including some in general aviation who want a second airport almost as convenient in location as Honolulu International.

But the essential public-interest issue is not just the happiness and convenience of those in general aviation. It is the lives and safety of people — including many Hawaii residents daily — who fly in or out of Honolulu International.

It is the lives of people here who would be under a mid-air crash. Ironically, many live in districts represented by legislators who have been opposed to Poamoho or almost any reasonable alternative.

LEGISLATORS are elected and get paid to make tough choices. But in the case of the general aviation reliever airport that choice for years has been a non-choice that puts off an inevitable need, adds to the costs, and perpetuates a clear and growing danger to human lives.

This session the Legislature owes it to everyone, not to mention its own election year image, to make a positive decision. It has run out of excuses.

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