

September 27, 2024 Oregon Joint Committee on Transportation Hearing

Co-Chairs Rep. McLain, Sen. Gorsek, members of the committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to offer comments.

The primary focus of my testimony is to urge a ban on all state funding for airports until the adverse health, environmental, global warming and livability impacts are fully understood and ameliorated. In addition, flight training businesses, private pilots, jet owners and hobbyists should be held legally responsible for reducing CO2 and other greenhouse gas emissions.

Less than one quarter of one percent of the U.S. population is certified to pilot an aircraft. Ninety percent are white men, a substantial portion of whom have the financial wherewithal to own public airports, private airstrips, flight training businesses, charter flight companies, personal jets, fixed wing aircraft and/or helicopters. This small sliver of the population has routinely benefited disproportionately from Connect Oregon aviation grants. Meanwhile, the state reports a scarcity of funds to invest in far less polluting transportation alternatives such as high speed rail, public transit, trails and bicycle paths.

For years many of us have been following government guidelines urging us to choose transportation options that reduce our global footprint - driving less, using public transit, bicycling, and walking more. Our efforts, however, are undermined and negated by state policies that promote, fund and encourage airport growth and expansions.

During Connect Oregon cycles I through VIII, various Oregon aviation and airport related proposals received \$114,280,719 million, more than 25% of all Connect Oregon multimodal allotments awarded. This funding subsidized expansions such as building new hangars (oversized garages), constructing longer runways, air traffic control towers and other projects. In addition, out of the 21 projects prioritized for Connect Oregon IX disbursements, 9 airports are recommended to receive yet another \$20 million.

Not only is aviation one of the most polluting forms of transportation on the planet, the propeller aircraft that fly in and out of Oregon's airports still use leaded fuel. According to the EPA, nationwide, piston-engine aircraft release nearly one million pounds, (470 tons) of lead into the air every year. These emissions account for 70% of all airborne lead released in the U.S. [[Envirofacts](#) | [US EPA](#)]

In Oregon, the mobile aircraft sector is responsible for more than 87% of all airborne lead emitted in the state, more than 18,227 pounds (9 tons) every year. In addition, heavy concentrations of ground-based lead, not accounted for in the EPA National Emissions Inventory (NEI), are released during pre-flight run-up procedures. [[Envirofacts](#) | [US EPA](#)]

What Does This Mean for Impacted Residents?

Below are examples of how Connect Oregon grants are responsible for significant environmental degradation, including lead pollution, across the state.

In 2008 Hillsboro Airport (HIO) ranked 21st in the nation out of 20,000 U.S. airports in lead emissions. After receiving a \$4 million Connect Oregon III grant for the construction of a third runway primarily to serve private pilots, hobbyists, and the for-profit international flight training industry, HIO became the 8th largest lead polluting airport in the nation. Due in large part to this excessive aviation activity, Washington County is now the most lead polluted jurisdiction in Oregon.

The Bend Municipal Airport (BDN) in Central Oregon provides another example. As a direct result of several Connect Oregon grants totaling more than \$6 million primarily to benefit Leading Edge, a for-profit flight training business, a previously peaceful rural community was decimated. FAA records reveal that between 1995 and 2020, operations at this facility increased seven-fold, from 19,000 to 141,000. Before Connect Oregon, BDN was the 14th largest airport in the state but as a direct result of Connect Oregon disbursements, this facility has become the third busiest airport in Oregon. Due to the dominance of lead spewing, piston-engine aircraft, it is now the second largest lead polluting airport in Oregon and one of the top 100 lead polluting airports in the entire country.

Aurora Airport (UAO), the largest facility source of lead pollution in Marion County, is one of twenty-eight airports owned and operated by the Oregon Department of Aviation (ODAV). Both UAO and ODAV have received Connect Oregon grants. Friends of French Prairie along with the cities of Aurora and Wilsonville have long advocated for residents of these communities and for the preservation of farmland, yet Connect Oregon grants are being used to undermine these efforts on behalf of wealthy aircraft owners intent on expanding a runway onto prime farmland to accommodate their larger jets. Aggressive efforts by ODAV to push its myopic agenda have lead to multiple legal challenges at great time and expense to the local community.

These are just a few examples of the land use conflicts, environmental pollution, inequities, exploitation and social injustices that have arisen as a direct result of Connect Oregon aviation funding.

It does not have to be this way.

Solutions for Reducing Aviation Activity in Oregon

- Terminate all state funding for airports. Instead institute landing, user and environmental fees on all aircraft including those weighing less than 10,000 lbs so that the users of these airports pay the actual cost for their flight training, aviation hobbies, recreational flights, and business transportation choices.
- On 9/22/2024, Governor Gavin Newsom signed SB1193, a bill introduced by CA State Senator Caroline Menjivar. The bill phases out leaded aviation fuel by January 1, 2031. Oregon should support similar legislation with the goal of phasing out leaded aviation fuel by 2025.
- With its narrow focus on leveraging grant money from the FAA and other funding sources, Connect Oregon's aviation program has severely compromised the livability, health and well-being of communities across this state. Leveraging FAA money should not be a primary consideration especially since many of the expansion projects funded by Connect Oregon contributed to an increase in noise as well as the release of lead emissions, criteria pollutants, and air toxins over impacted communities. For this reason, any airport or entity that seeks state aid should be required to fund an unbiased, third party health impact study and also provide evidence of lead, noise and pollution monitoring at areas of highest impact on, downwind and adjacent to airport properties. Locations at a distance from the airport under a flight track or routinely subjected to repetitive flight training activity should also be monitored.
- Our planet is in peril due to global warming. To help slow this process, laws prohibiting aircraft owners and operators from affixing fuel flowage fees on every gallon of gas sold at

their airports must be established. Profiting from the sale of fuels that contribute to lead poisoning, global warming and extreme weather events must be outlawed.

- Establish a democratic process by which members of the Port of Portland Board of Commissioners are elected rather than appointed by the Governor. Elections will allow impacted communities to make informed and educated decisions on who can best represent their concerns. The Port of Portland is the biggest lead polluter in the state as a result of the emissions released by their airports - PDX, Hillsboro and Troutdale. These same airports are also a significant source of air toxins and criteria pollutants including benzene, PM2.5, CO2 and a number of other dangerous emissions that pose a risk to public health and the environment.
- The second largest lead polluter in Oregon is the Oregon Department of Aviation. The members of ODAV are also appointed by the Governor. They, too, should be elected to insure that community concerns are addressed in a democratic forum.
- At the very least, impacted community members, environmental, and public health experts should be appointed to serve as members of these boards. On 5/17/2024 Colorado Governor Jared Polis signed into law **HB24-1235 Reduce Aviation Impacts on Communities**. Section 5 of the bill included provisions to appoint impacted community members to the state aeronautical board.
- The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has identified living in proximity to airports as a risk factor for lead poisoning, yet despite this knowledge Oregon only tests a small fraction of the population. Oregon has a long history of being out of compliance with federal **Medicaid directives** which require all children to be tested at 12 and 24 months. Money saved by eliminating Connect Oregon aviation grants can be invested into increasing lead screenings and providing treatment to children with elevated blood lead levels living near airports.
- Require airports to post signs warning of the increased risk of lead poisoning for people living, recreating, working or spending time within one and half miles of airports that service piston-engine aircraft.
- All Oregon airports should be required to switch to unleaded aviation fuel once the Port of Portland transitions to G100UL at HIO, to insure that pilots won't continue to release lead emissions by fueling up at airports that continue to sell leaded avgas.
- Require the establishment of community advisory committees at all Oregon airports. Though HIO is the largest general aviation airport in the state, the Hillsboro Airport Advisory Committee established by the Port, has not met in more than two years. Port formed committees are typically stacked with pilots and airport businesses who expect to benefit either personally or professionally from airport expansion projects. In the process the concerns of area residents are ignored, dismissed and marginalized. Members serving on these committees should represent impacted residents, not the aviation industry.
- Develop a Peace Corps model requiring U.S. flight schools that want to train foreign students to establish pilot instruction programs in their respective countries. This would free up an enormous amount of federal and state money that could be more prudently invested in sustainable transportation options such as high speed rail, public transit, walking trails and bicycle paths. The Hillsboro Airport is a case in point. The largest tenant at the airport is Hillsboro Aero Academy (HAA), a company that is owned by two east coast investment firms - Graycliff Partners and Renovus Capital. HAA's website states that the company has trained pilots from over 75 countries. Local residents who are historically denied a

meaningful voice in the process, are barraged with noise, lead and other toxic pollutants resulting from this training. Following is a list of HAA's industry and collegiate partners. Most are from overseas.

HAA Industry Partners - Alaska Airlines, Horizon Air, Korean Air, China Eastern, Air China, Sichuan Airlines, Juneyao Air, Shandong Airlines, Hainan Airlines, Japan Airlines, Ameriflight, Bristow, ADAC, Avincis Aviation Critical Services

HAA Collegiate Partners - Portland Community College, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical, University, Liberty University, Purdue University Global, Korea Aerospace University, Chiba Institute of Science, Kogakuin University, Daiichi Institute of Technology.

Bear in mind that a number of the U.S. colleges and universities that appear on this list recruit heavily from outside the U.S.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Miki Barnes

Oregon Aviation Watch

