6 AIRPORT

OVERVIEW

La Plata County is home to the Four Corners area's largest commercial airport, owned and operated jointly by the City of Durango and La Plata County. Currently served by four major commercial airlines, Durango-La Plata County Airport (DRO) is located approximately 16 miles southeast of the city limits offering travelers a convenient way to access larger hubs for travel around the world. Pursuant to Title 41 of the Colorado Revised Statutes (C.R.S.), the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) is granted the authority to establish, acquire real property, incur indebtedness, and operate a facility such as DRO at their discretion. (C.R.S. §41-4-102 to §41-4-106).

Also within the County is the privately owned/maintained general aviation airport, Animas Airpark (Airpark). Located 4 miles south of the City of Durango, the Airpark exists within a public-use residential, commercial and industrial air park covering approximately 35 acres in the La Posta Road Area Planning District. The Airpark is designated an "intermediate airport" by the 2012 Colorado Aviation System Plan Update (CASPU), which indicates the airpark primarily serves and meets the operating requirements of single engine, multi-engine and general aviation business jet activity. A recent master plan for the airpark was completed in September of 2015, and can be found in Appendix 21. Primarily, the historic use of the Airpark has been via single-engine piston, multi-engine piston, turboprop, as well as light turbojet aircraft. Flight trainings, as well as general business and recreational transportation are the primary uses associated with the aircraft identified.

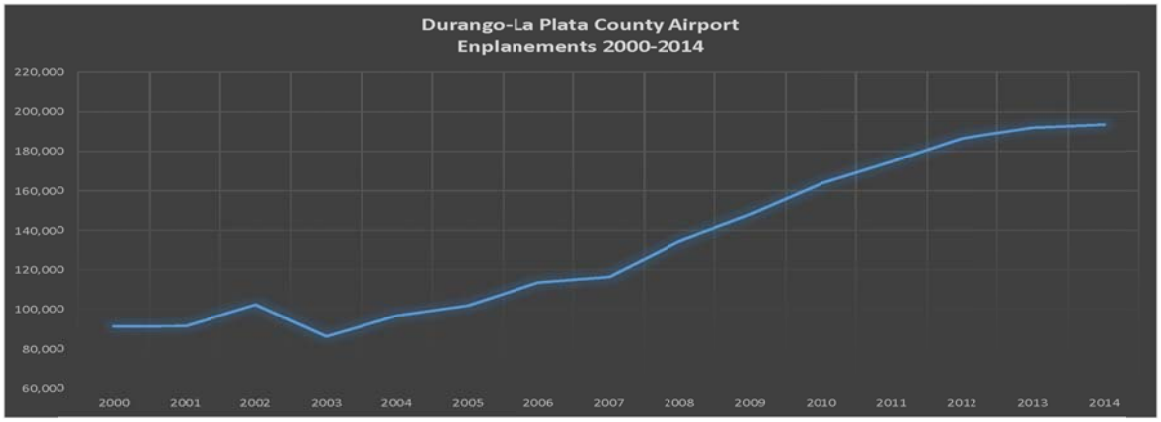
AIRPORT GROWTH

The DRO property is approximately 1,382 acres. The first 257 acres of land was purchased in 1947 from the Southern Ute Indian Reservation. Through Federal funding/aid, an additional 1,125 acres was purchased in 1959 comprising what is the current-day DRO. Construction of the main terminal began in 1987, opening for business later in 1988. The main facility of DRO has a footprint of roughly 36,400sq/ft, with an additional 5,100 sq/ft of temporary building space installed in 2013 giving way to the airport's current 41,500 sq/ft configuration of terminal, restaurant, and vending space[1].

Since the establishment of DRO, significant changes have occurred in the County, population increase being one of the more notable aspects. From 1970 to 2000, the County's total population increased by approximately 178% (5.9% annually). Further, as projected by the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA), the County is on-course to reach a population of about 75,000 by 2030. For a more in-depth analysis regarding population growth and distribution, see *Element 2 – Growth Trends,* of this Plan. Nevertheless, in addition to events such 9/11 and the downturn in the economy in 2008, increases in population have translated into a significant increase of passenger travel to and from DRO, where other airports of similar characteristics nationwide continued to lag.

[1] Durango-La Plata County Airport Master Plan 2015. See Appendix 16.

Chart 6-1



2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
91,276	91,405	102,175	86,198	96,560	101,742	113,516	116,310	134,386	148,077	163,611	174,805	186,567	191,980	193,537

City of Durango Enplanement Data, 2000-2014

As depicted in the graph above, *Chart 6-1*, enplanement[2] data reflects a steady increase in passenger travel over the last fifteen years. This also altered the type of aircraft utilized for travel. Pre-9/11, the typical aircraft sat less than 20 passengers per departure, whereas today, aircraft vary in size from 50 to nearly 140 per departure[3]. Furthermore, the increase in enplanement data, and an increase of aircraft passengers, has undoubtedly caused stress on the infrastructure and facility associated with the airport.

Forecasted growth of the Airport is expected to continue upward over the next 20 years. The recent DRO Airport Master Plan forecasts enplanements to reach 304,784 by 2035 based upon a moderate annual growth rate of 1.9%. This is a 46% increase over the existing 2015 level of 208,476 enplanements. The primary factors driving an increase in forecasted enplanements is the continued trend in larger regional aircraft that will serve markets such as DRO, the transition of existing seasonal frequency to year round service, and the probable addition of one or more new destinations and increased frequency to existing destinations in the future.[4] Recognizing its regional scale and potential associated growth of DRO, its existing size, which currently operates at 50% of the needed space to accommodate travelers, and configuration are not adequate to service the current influx of passengers without contemplation for significant planned, strategic facility improvements.

AIRPORT LAND USE

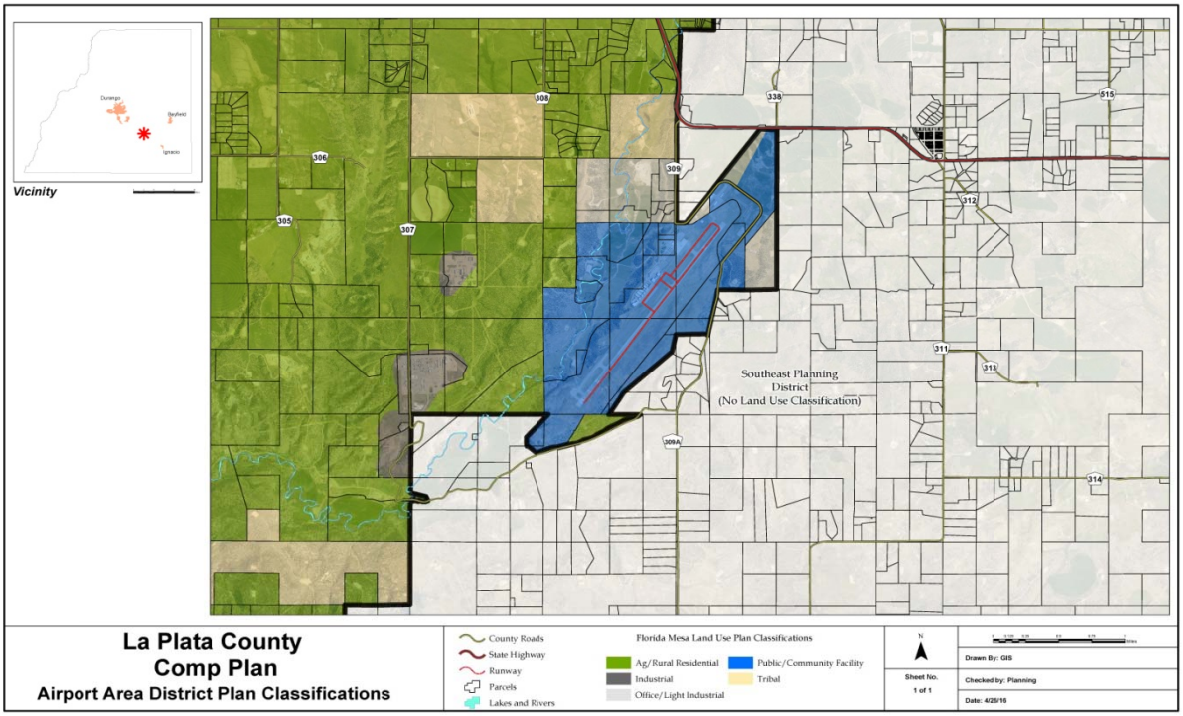
With steady population growth occurring in La Plata County, the agricultural and rural residential landscapes have also seen significant changes. Residential growth has been moving from the activity/growth hub of Durango, to outer lying areas such as Grandview, Elmore's

[2] Enplanement: a person boarding an aircraft on a departing flight.
[3] Durango-La Plata County Airport 2014 White Papers
[4] Durango La Plata County Airport Master Plan 2015

Corner, and Bayfield as well as along the main transportation corridors such as Hwy 550 and Hwy 160. Because of this, infrastructure demands have seen shifts from individual water and sewer systems, to expansion of central utility services that were once not in place.

Additional guidance for that growth is provided by La Plata County's thirteen individual planning districts. DRO property, in particular, lies on the eastern edge of the Florida Mesa Planning District (FMPD), with one small piece of property falling within the Southeast District (SED). Specific to FMPD, the property has a land use designation of *Public/Community Facility*, a land use classification specific public land uses such as airports, schools, and government uses. In contrast, residents of the SED elected not adopt a district plan and as a result there are no formal land use classifications. Lands immediately surrounding DRO are primarily designated as *Office/Light Industrial*, and *Ag/Rural Residential* as depicted below. Descriptions of these designations can also be found in Appendix 6.

Map 6-1 DRO Airport – Florida Mesa District Plan



Due to the surrounding uses and lack of traditional zoning measures in the vicinity of DRO, it is important to contemplate the future build out of the area surrounding the airport. As mentioned above, the continued expansion of central utility services following the residential population's movement out of downtown Durango has drawn a correlation of those services being shifted towards DRO. Currently, La Plata-Archuleta Water District (LAPLAWD) has expanded their water servicing area to just northeast of the town site of Oxford, approximately 3.4 miles from DRO. Additionally, South Durango Sanitation and Loma Linda sewer services are located at the junction of State Highway 160 and 172, northwest of the Airport. With that in mind, focusing on higher intensive commercial and industrial uses in and around DRO may be appropriate to

consider.

Impacts generated from airports range from high average daily trips (ADTs) to and from the airport, significant noise, and construction of necessary infrastructure to support those activities. Responding to those impacts through planning may require similar uses to be present in the DRO area, with a focus on moving business to the area. Although parcels in the surrounding area may be of residential classifications, the relocation of companies such as British Petroleum America (BP America) to the airport access road highlights the need for industry to be around an airport. Furthermore, with compatible uses operating in the same locale, mitigation typically required for residential establishments would become less of an issue.

To drive compatible development in and around the Airport, infrastructure for utilities needs to be in place. Typically, commercial ventures in La Plata County require higher demands of utility services due to their intensive operations. Specific to water and sewer needs, those entities providing utilities have been expanding their service area east of Durango, encroaching on those outlying areas around the Airport. Further, as discussed in *Element 4 – Infrastructure*, policies contained therein encourage the development of infrastructure where future growth of the County at large has been identified. As a result, one can draw a correlation between those infrastructure demands, in addition to those locations identified for build out with the expansion of the Airport, and furthermore driving commercial and light industrial development to those areas. The goal is to ensure that such development surrounding the Airport does not result in incompatible land uses that could interfere with safe operations and pose hazards to the public.

> *Focusing on higher intensive commercial and industrial uses in and around DRO may be appropriate to consider.*

Fortunately, the Airport is predominantly surrounded by agricultural and low-density residential, which have proven to be compatible land uses since the establishment of the Airport. Given the absence of any formal zoning in this area, the recommendation of the Airport Master Plan limits additional land use controls to monitoring trends in subdivisions in the county and keeping a good dialog with surrounding residents. Such a minimal regulatory approach is partly enabled by the fact that there are no noise sensitive land uses within the 65db day/night average noise contour. The 65 DNL contour is a standard metric for identifying average noise levels, above which would not be compatible with noise sensitive uses such as residential development.

As a long-term strategy, the Airport Master Plan suggests DRO could benefit from the establishment of an Airport Zone or Overlay Zone that would provide for notification of the airport's proximity to prospective real estate buyers and would allow DRO staff to be notified of any development proposals within the zone so that staff could provide the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners comments on the effects that a proposed development could have on airport operations and compatibility.[5]

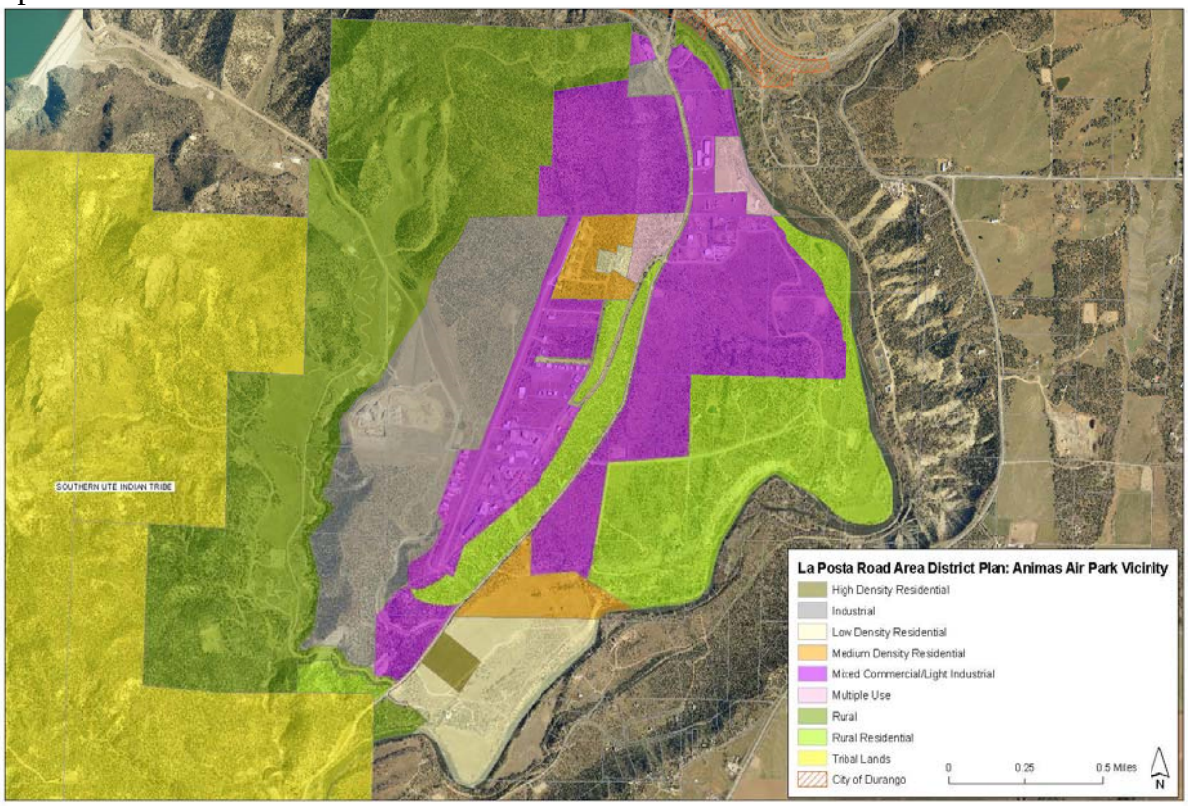
[5] Airport Master Plan 2015

6 AIRPORT

There are several aspects of the Airport that are recommended in the Airport Master Plan for expansion or redevelopment in the future. This includes a new access road north of the Airport to SH 172 due to the substandard sight distance of the existing intersection of CR 309 (Airport Road) and SH 172. Additionally, extension of the Runway Protection Zone (RPZ) at the south end will require the Airport to acquire two small pieces of land, whereas the north RPZ expansion can occur within existing airport property. The most significant redevelopment at the Airport is the potential for a new terminal, of which the three alternatives are described in the Airport Master Plan.

In recognition of the County's smaller general aviation airport, the Airpark has also been identified for future growth. A recent construction project partially funded by the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) brought central water to the Airpark vicinity, allowing for those commercial and industrial businesses to have a more reliable water supply to continue. As depicted in the map below, a majority of the properties have a designation of *mixed commercial/light industrial*, giving way to an area primed for future development for operations aligning with that designation. Further, the area surrounding the Airpark has been identified for not only commercial and industrial businesses, but also that type of industry that may need reliable access to a localized airport for transportation of goods and services.

Map 6-2 Animas Air Park – La Posta Road Area District Plan



ECONOMIC IMPACT

In rural counties such as La Plata, economies rely on diverse outputs in terms of contributions to the community at large. Although oil and gas has played a significant role in generating local tax revenues, DRO has become part of that makeup, as one of the economic drivers to not only the County, but the region at large. As stated in a 2013 Economic Impact Study conducted by the Colorado Department of Transportation, "economic contributions of these activities are measured through jobs, associated payroll, and economic output." Through two different lenses, these impacts can be measured on both a local and regional scale.

At the local level, DRO has been a significant contributor to the area at large. DRO employs twenty one (21) full-time employees to oversee the daily functions and maintenance of the airport, with an estimated 2,636 jobs in the County that contribute DRO services. Because of increases noted above, demands for services looking forward should expand this number even further. With a pay roll of $94 million, DRO accommodates more than 200,000 visitors annually, providing an estimated $282 million in economic contributions. Further, working collaboratively with DRO, two big players in the area that can be credited with driving an influx of tourism dollars to the local area are Telluride and Purgatory ski areas. In 2015, DRO began to establish an affiliation with Telluride Ski Resort to promote the airport as a means of access to the ski area. Additionally, because of the proximity of Purgatory to the town of Durango, local hotels, restaurants, and businesses have benefited from DRO bringing those recreationists to the local area from locations around the country. Moreover, with an increase in airplane size coupled with the introduction of new flight paths to and from DRO, businesses in the local area can expect a steady increase of tourism dollars.

Although smaller in scale and activity, the Airpark has also been a contributor to the local economy. Completed in 2013, Colorado Department of Transportation conducted an economic impact assessment of the Airpark, looking at the operation outputs and tax revenues generated. The Airpark by way of jobs and dollars spent by travelers utilizing the facility contribute roughly $82,000 to the local and regional economy. Additionally, looking forward, the Airpark which as mentioned above has 29 commercial properties in its vicinity will likely increase their tax base contribution in years to come as businesses who need localized air commerce will move into those locations, and will be incentivized to do so as infrastructure needs are accommodated.

Lastly, although aviation facilities are located in the four corners region including Farmington and Cortez, only Grand Junction sees comparable enplanement. As stated in the 2015 Airport Master Plan, DRO saw an estimated 208,476 passengers, with Grand Junction receiving just over 214,000. Cortez saw a significant decrease (-53%) in enplanement servicing just 3,920 passengers[6] over the annum. Because of this, trends will likely give way to DRO being the major aviation facility in the four corners for years to come.

[6] CDOT Division of Aeronautics Annual Report

GOALS

Goal 6.1: The Airport should sufficiently meet current and projected future needs of traveling public, persons and area businesses in a manner that is safe, economical, and environmentally sound.

Objective 6.1.A: Continue to identify and promote the maintenance of infrastructure needs for the Airport throughout the County.

Policy 6.1.A1: Develop an inventory of all infrastructure components needed for basic operations of the Airport.

Policy 6.1.A2: Develop and maintain a capital improvements budget with funds appropriated directly for long-term Airport infrastructure improvements.

Objective 6.1.B: Coordinate with local agencies regarding the future build-out of facility and infrastructure components which may be beneficial for the Airport and those operations in the vicinity of such facility and infrastructure.

Policy 6.1.B1: Identify an inventory of lands in and around the Airport that could accommodate commercial and industrial uses.

Policy 6.1.B2: Explore funding mechanisms to invest in the County's infrastructure needs that would benefit aviation and commercial facilities.

Policy 6.1.B3: Consider opportunities to incentivize complementary uses within the vicinity of the Airport.

Policy 6.1.B4: Coordinate future build-out efforts of the Airport, as well as surrounding properties, consistently with the adopted DRO Master Plan.

Objective 6.1C: Identify and inventory key roads and travel patterns used by the general public to access the airport from the City of Durango and surrounding areas.

Policy 6.1.C1: Establish a funding mechanism to secure financial contributions providing for maintenance and construction of identified roadways.

Policy 6.1.C2: Work with local transportation agencies to promote uniform traffic patterns for access to Airport facilities.

Policy 6.1.C3: Identify, accommodate, and promote multi-modal forms of transportation county-wide, used for accessing the Airport where applicable.

Objective 6.1.D: Develop planning strategies to identify appropriate land uses along the primary transportation corridors to, and around the airport.

Policy 6.1.D1: Consider the use of corridor overlay's along primary travel routes to the airport from more populated areas, in order to identify and plan for appropriate land uses.

Policy 6.1.D2: Maintain existing and conventional planning techniques to manage compatible/incompatible development, such as monitoring trends in subdivision activity in the county and maintaining a dialog with area residents.

Policy 6.1.D3: Identify and establish strategies to protect wildlife, view sheds, and recreational opportunities within the vicinity of DRO. Such strategies should consider Federal safety standards when applicable.

Policy 6.1.D4: Consider implementing an Airport Zone or Overlay Zone which could clearly articulate compatible uses.

Policy 6.1.D5: Identify and consider adoption of land use code provisions for avigation easements, where appropriate.

Policy 6.1.D6: In accordance with Colorado Revised Statutes (CRS) 24-65-102(1) consider use of *1041 Powers* to manage land uses around the Airport (Area of State Interest).

Policy 6.1.D7: Identify appropriate land uses around and proximate to the airport which promote efficient development necessary for Airport travelers and surrounding businesses.

Policy 6.1.D8: Encourage and guide infrastructure development toward areas identified by a corridor planning strategy.

Goal 6.2: DRO and Animas Airpark should be encouraged to develop in a manner consistent with safety standards in their respective, adopted master plans.

Objective 6.2.A: Continue to participate with updates to the airports adopted master plans.

Policy 6.2.A1: Maintain safety standards as outlined by CDOT, FAA and IATA as applicable.