

SR 2 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY**Carrier:** Sen. Girod**Senate Committee On Rules****Action Date:** 05/28/25**Action:** Do adopt.**Vote:** 5-0-0-0**Yeas:** 5 - Bonham, Golden, Jama, Manning Jr, Thatcher**Fiscal:** No fiscal impact**Revenue:** No revenue impact**Prepared By:** Leslie Porter, LPRO Analyst**Meeting Dates:** 4/16, 5/28**WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:**

The measure recognizes the important role of Aurora State Airport in the State of Oregon's emergency preparedness and response efforts.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- The importance of the Aurora State Airport, should a major earthquake occur, and the importance of planning and preparing for such an event
- The conditional use permit the airport needs to continue its current operations, and potential consequences of its closure
- The companies and emergency operations organizations headquartered and located at the airport
- Local government opinions about the Aurora State Airport, and its potential future use as a hub for emergency response
- The desire to support the airport, but not taking a position on local government issues

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

During World War II, Aurora Flight Strip was built in northern Marion County, Oregon, by the United States Army Air Forces. The new facility was completed in 1943 and was used as a base for patrolling the coast for enemy ships and aircraft, for pilot training, and as a supporting airfield to Portland Army Air Base. Following the war, the airfield was eventually turned over to the control of the State of Oregon by the federal government. Today, it is a general aviation airport owned and operated by the Oregon Department of Aviation, and it is one of the busiest airports in the state.

Aurora State Airport covers an area of 144 acres, making it the largest of Oregon's state-owned airports. In 2009, the Legislative Assembly passed a resolution naming the airstrip Wes Lematta Field at Aurora State Airport, in honor of the late founder of Columbia Helicopters, Inc., which is based at the airport.

Aurora State Airport is uniquely positioned to provide enormous assets to the Willamette Valley, the State of Oregon, and the Pacific Northwest region following a major seismic event or other cataclysmic natural disaster. Soil studies predict a negligible soil settlement following a major seismic event, which indicates that the runway, taxiways, and parking aprons will likely remain fully operational with very little needed repair.

The airport is also a major headquarters and base of operations for two of the largest heavy-lift helicopter companies in the United States, Columbia Helicopters, Inc., and Helicopter Transport Services, which will provide essential supply transportation services following a major disaster. It is the regional headquarters for Life Flight Network, which is the principal emergency air medical service for the northwestern United States, and whose

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services will be critical to the people of the region following a disaster.

The airport is the base of operations for two companies that specialize in repair and adjustment of major electrical grid power lines: Wilson Construction Company and Winco Powerline Services. These resiliency-critical businesses all have major aircraft maintenance facilities at the airport for their specialized aircraft, with ready-to-use test equipment, rebuild machines, spare parts inventory, tools, skilled aircraft maintenance workforce, specialty aviation accessories, and aeromedical equipment in fully functional condition for use during an emergency.

The airport is a base for the Oregon Disaster Airlift Response Team, which is an all-volunteer airlift resource whose mission is to help communities and emergency responders cope with a local disaster. It is also home to the Aurora Composite Squadron, Oregon Wing, of the United States Air Force Auxiliary's Civil Air Patrol, which provides essential search and rescue and emergency response operations.

The airport is surrounded by agricultural lands that, during an emergency, can be repurposed as staging areas for use in emergency management operations. It was constructed as a military airport, and its runway was designed to be capable of landing heavy military-type aircraft.

The airport has more than 1 million square feet of aviation hangar, office, and shop space that can be quickly transitioned for emergency management operations. Numerous federal, state, and local emergency management plans document the importance of the airport as an essential resiliency facility. The Aurora Airport Improvement Association continues to further develop plans and infrastructure so that Aurora State Airport can better serve its vital role as a resiliency facility to resupply and support the people of the State of Oregon following a major seismic event or other cataclysmic natural disaster.