DESTINATION LINDBERGH:
COLLABORATION AND VISION TO MEET SAN DIEGO’S MOBILITY NEEDS
By Bob Leiter, FAICP, Keith Wilschetz, and Tait Galloway

INTRODUCTION

Destination Lindbergh was a year-long, comprehensive planning process designed to:

• Determine the ultimate build-out configuration of San Diego International Airport at Lindbergh Field (SDIA),
• Minimize airport-related traffic impacts to adjacent communities, and
• Improve intermodal access to the airport, while considering the airport as a potential location for a regional transportation hub.

In order to address the three priorities comprehensively, Destination Lindbergh was an integrated, regional surface and air transportation planning effort centered on SDIA.

A breakthrough alliance of the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority, the City of San Diego and the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) formed the Ad Hoc Airport Regional Policy Committee, chaired by San Diego Mayor Jerry Sanders. The Ad Hoc Committee also invited other key participants to assist in this important effort, including policy makers from the San Diego Unified Port District, the County of San Diego, the Metropolitan Transit System, the North County Transit District and the U.S. Department of Defense.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A wide ranging set of goals and objectives was developed through discussions with the Ad Hoc Airport Regional Policy Committee. The priority in developing the goals and objectives was to ensure that the resulting plan improved the quality of life for San Diego County residents. Accordingly, the effort evaluated the potential for an Intermodal Transportation Center (ITC) in order to reach ground transportation and intermodal facility goals. In addition, future facility requirements for the airfield and passenger terminals were evaluated within the broader context of the overall region’s transportation needs—not just from the aviation perspective. The goals and objectives also ensured that concerns regarding the natural environment and responsible regional development were considered. Finally, a goal regarding financial feasibility called for the ultimate development plan to be implemented in cost-effective phases while leveraging existing infrastructure to the maximum extent possible. The Ad Hoc Committee also acknowledged the critical importance of maintaining a high level of customer service for SDIA passengers throughout the development process.

The goals of Destination Lindbergh are:

Ground Transportation
• Improve direct access by auto and various modes of transit to SDIA and accommodate vehicle parking demand.

Intermodal Facility
• Develop an intermodal facility to provide access for passengers and employees to SDIA and strengthen regional connectivity.
Passenger Terminal
• Develop passenger terminal facilities to efficiently accommodate projected passenger demand and enhance user satisfaction

Airfield/Airspace
• Within the constraints of SDIA’s property and single runway, develop an airfield configuration to best accommodate projected levels of aircraft operations (takeoffs and landings)

Environment
• Incorporate best practices of environmental stewardship in all components of SDIA’s physical environment and operations

Financial
• Develop a financially feasible plan

Regional Development – San Diego County/Southern CA
• Leverage SDIA to provide major direct and indirect social and economic benefits

Regional Development – Downtown/Convention Center
• Integrate SDIA, through context-sensitive urban design, into the fabric of the central San Diego area, including the downtown, waterfront, Convention Center, Embarcadero and harbor areas

EXISTING AIRPORT FACILITIES
SDIA is located approximately three miles northwest of downtown San Diego and comprises 661 acres. The airport features a single 9,400-foot long east-west runway. The runway is supported by a full-length parallel taxiway—Taxiway B—on the south side, and by a partial-length parallel taxiway—Taxiway C—on the north side (see Figure 1). Terminal 1 was constructed in 1967 and has 19 aircraft gates. Terminal 2 East was opened in 1979 and provides 13 gates, while the 9 gate Terminal 2 West opened in 1998. The Commuter Terminal, which opened in 1996, serves smaller aircraft with seven regional aircraft parking positions and also serves as the Authority headquarters. Support facilities, including the fuel farm, air traffic control tower (ATCT), and cargo and general aviation facilities, are located primarily north of the runway.

EXISTING TRANSIT FACILITIES
Existing transit service to the airport terminals consists of a single local bus route that connects downtown San Diego, the region’s biggest transit hub, with SDIA. The downtown terminus of the route provides connections to the light rail, commuter rail, and bus system serving the region. There is currently no direct rail access to the airport, since the terminals and passenger access points are located on the south side of the airfield along Harbor Drive, while the existing rail infrastructure runs near the airport’s northern boundary of Pacific Highway. Preparation of this plan thus presented a great opportunity to develop this long-needed rail connection.
OVERVIEW OF DESTINATION LINDBERGH PLAN

As noted above, the purpose of the Destination Lindbergh planning effort was to strategize regarding the ultimate build-out of Lindbergh Field, review the potential for an intermodal transportation center, and determine actions that could reduce traffic impacts on surrounding local streets. In addition, the study assessed the feasibility of direct access ramps from Interstate 5 (I-5) to the proposed northside Intermodal Transportation Center (ITC).

Scenario Development
Based on the fact that Lindbergh Field is generally oriented in an east-west direction and is bisected by a single runway, it was determined that opportunities for increased ground access existed from rail lines and I-5 in the northeast corner of the airport. Three broad site planning scenarios emerged during the study process:

1. A north-centric scenario with a single entrance to the airport on the north side of the airfield, with all airline processing functions (ticketing, check in, and baggage) and gates, as well as an ITC and direct I-5 access along the rail corridor south of Washington Street. This scenario would require land from the Marine Corps Recruit Depot to accommodate an expansion of Taxiway C.

2. A south-centric scenario where the gates and airline processing remain on the south side of the runway, but access is provided in the north and a connection made to the south via an internal road or a people-mover system.

3. A hybrid scenario where ground access and airline processing was developed on both the north side and the south side of the airport. Connection of the ITC and gates on the north to gates on the south would be made via a people mover.

Recommended Development Plan and Phasing
The recommended development plan, while taking the best aspects of each scenario, most closely resembled the south-centric scenario (see Figure 2). In the final build-out all access to the airport processing functions would be provided in facilities north of the runway along Pacific Highway with a people mover connection to redeveloped terminals on the south. Elements of the long-term plan include: development of an ITC allowing connection and transfer from rail (intercity, commuter and high-speed), Trolley, and bus (local, future Bus Rapid Transit, and Fly Away), direct I-5 ramp access, a consolidated rental car facility (CONRAC), and parking garages. Passenger processing would be immediately adjacent to the ITC. A total of 62 gates would be re-constructed on the south side of the runway. Should land from Marine Corps Recruit Depot become available in the future, the scenario could be modified to allow the construction of gates on the north side of the runway.
Implementing the long-range plan would likely require 20 to 25 years. Construction timing would depend on additional financial feasibility analysis, environmental, engineering, and design work. Destination Lindbergh recommends completion of the project in three phases:

- **Phase 1 - Initial Opening Day (2015-2020).** This phase would include development of rail platforms, additional track work, bus bays, and a grade-separated pedestrian crossing onto airport property from an ITC to, a CONRAC facility and additional parking that would be built concurrently on airport property. Connection from parking, CONRAC, and the ITC to the south side terminals would be made by way of a shuttle bus service operating on airport property. I-5 access would be improved through greater use of existing ramps to the south of the facility and improvements to local streets, including Sassafras Street and Pacific Highway, in the area of the airport. Ground access to the airport would be provided on both the north and the south side of the airport.

- **Phase 2 - 2020 Planning Activity Level (PAL) 1 timeframe.** In this phase, when it is projected that there will be 20 million air passengers a year, direct access ramps from I-5 would be added as well as a people mover replacing the shuttle bus connection. Passenger processing would be added to the north side facility as part of the replacement for the older gates in Terminal 1. In this phase, ground access would also remain to Terminal 2 from North Harbor Drive.

- **Phase 3 - 2030 Planning Activity Level (PAL) 2 timeframe.** In this phase, when it is projected that there will be 28 million air passengers, access and processing would be completed to the north side with the replacement of Terminal 2. North Harbor Drive would no longer provide access to passenger processing facilities, and direct access ramps from I-5 would be completed. During this phase, North Harbor Drive would be used only to access airport support and potential long-term parking facilities.

**Increased Transit Use at an Intermodal Transportation Center**

Approximately 1.3 percent of airport passengers currently use transit to SDIA. Efforts underway by the Airport Authority and other regional transportation agencies are designed to increase that percentage to 4 to 5 percent over the next 10 years. Analysis conducted as part of the Destination Lindbergh study by SANDAG indicated that potential exists to increase the use of transit at the airport even further through development of an ITC, to somewhere in the range of 8.5 percent to 13.0 percent by the year 2030. If shared-ride van and high-speed rail numbers are included, the range increases to 15.5 percent to 21.0 percent (from the current 9.3 percent of combined shared-ride van and transit use at the airport) which has the potential to reduce future traffic congestion to the airport. This level of activity is comparable to current level of transit trips to Oakland and San Francisco airports.

Further analysis indicated that an ITC at the airport would also result in an increase in non-airport transit trips within the region and could function as an independent facility (without the airport connection). However, it was recognized that the siting of an Intermodal Transportation Center at this particular location provides a unique opportunity to capture airport-bound passengers.

**FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Initial analysis concludes that a Phase 1 (Opening Day/ITC/CONRAC/Parking) facility could be financially feasible and function effectively as an independent improvement. Further analysis is needed to determine the viability of the Phase 2 and 3 improvements. Total capital costs are estimated at $3.8 billion (in 2009 dollars), with $457 million of that required for the 2015 Opening Day phase.

For implementation of Phase 1, a variety of potential funding sources have been identified, including: Transportation Infrastructure Finance Innovation Act (TIFIA)
loans, Airport Improvement Program grants, Passenger Facility Charges, tax increment financing, and a variety of potential federal, state, and local funding sources.

**NEXT STEPS**

During spring 2009, the Destination Lindbergh Plan was accepted by the City of San Diego, Airport Authority, and SANDAG. With the Airport Authority now moving ahead with its Terminal 2 West expansion project along with advanced planning for the CONRAC facility, SANDAG has undertaken a similar advanced planning effort for the ITC Phase 1 improvements. This advanced planning work will entail developing and evaluating alternatives for the ITC station layout, developing capital cost estimates (including right-of-way needs), outlining a ground access plan, refining transit ridership estimates, evaluating opening day traffic level of service impacts, developing a preliminary environmental assessment, and outlining a financial funding plan and implementation schedule. This advanced planning study will be completed by December 2010, and will set the stage for formal environmental studies.

Destination Lindbergh also includes long-term plans for direct freeway connecting ramps to the proposed north side airport terminal as well as surface street improvements. Developing detailed capital costs for the freeway connecting ramps and other needed surface street improvements at this time will allow local agencies to seek federal funding in the future multi-year transportation reauthorization bill and future annual appropriations processes. This study effort will require conceptual level engineering, and is scheduled for completion during 2011.

In addition to long-term access and roadway improvements, future land uses and urban form for the area surrounding the ITC will need to be considered. Destination Lindbergh concept calls for the ITC to be located off-airport property in the Midway Pacific Highway Corridor Community Plan area just south of Washington Street. In fall 2010, the City of San Diego will be beginning the update of the Midway Pacific Highway Corridor Community Plan. As part of the community plan update process, the City will work with SANDAG, the Airport Authority, the community, and other stakeholders to consider land use and mobility integration aspects related to the ITC and the long-term urban form vision for the area.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The Destination Lindbergh plan has set forth a vision for a multi-modal transportation project that will provide opportunities for increased transit ridership, reduced traffic on several local streets, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and optimization of the operational capacity of the airport within the given airfield and property constraints. While not the initial focus of the study, it also became clear as the study proceeded that the ITC could provide an excellent future location for the Downtown San Diego terminus of the California High Speed Rail System, which will ultimately connect San Diego to Los Angeles, the Central Valley, and the San Francisco Bay Area.

At the same time, the planning process that created this plan has laid the groundwork for continued collaboration among the Airport Authority, City of San Diego, and SANDAG, as well as many other stakeholders, in the implementation of this visionary plan.

**About the Authors**

Bob Leiter served as Director of Land Use and Transportation Planning for SANDAG from 2003 to 2009. He now serves as a consultant to SANDAG on SB-375 implementation. Keith Wilschetz serves as Director of Planning for the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority. Tait Galloway serves Senior Airport and Transportation Planner for the City of San Diego.