

U.S. Department of Transportation  
Federal Aviation Administration  
Southwest Region

**Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and Record of Decision (ROD)**

Runway 17R/35L Extension Project  
Valley International Airport  
Harlingen, Texas

June 2021

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The Valley International Airport (HRL or Airport) prepared the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) to facilitate the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) review and consideration of HRL's Runway 17R/35L Extension Project.

The FAA is the federal agency responsible for the approval of the Proposed Action analyzed in the EA, attached hereto. The FAA must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), other applicable statutes, and the NEPA implementing regulations (40 Code of Regulations (CFR) Parts 1500-1508) before taking any actions that are necessary prior to implementation of the project. After completing an EA, federal agencies must decide whether to issue a Finding of No Significant Impact and approve the proposed project or prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prior to rendering a final decision on approval of a proposed project. The FAA has completed the EA, considered its analysis, and determined that no further environmental review is required. The FAA has determined that the Proposed Action will have no significant impact to the human environment. Therefore, the FAA is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact/Record of Decision (FONSI/ROD) accompanied and supported by the EA, completing environmental review requirements for the project.

**2. BACKGROUND**

HRL is owned by the City of Harlingen and operated by the City of Harlingen Airport Board. The Airport Board is composed of nine members appointed by the Mayor and approved by the City Commission. The Airport is located in the City of Harlingen, which is in Cameron County. The Airport is the largest commercial service airport in the Rio Grande Valley and serves residents of the Brownsville-Harlingen metropolitan area.

In the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS), the FAA classifies the Airport as a small/non-hub primary commercial service airport. The primary service classification indicates that the Airport is a public use facility with scheduled air carrier service and has 10,000 or more enplaned passengers per year. There are three runways at the Airport:

- Runway 13/31 is 7,257 feet long by 150 feet wide;
- Runway 17L/35R is 5,949 feet long by 150 feet wide; and

- Runway 17R/35L is 8,301 feet long by 150 feet wide.

### **3. REQUESTED FEDERAL ACTION**

The Federal actions necessary for implementation of the Proposed Action are:

- A. Unconditional approval of the Airport Layout Plan (ALP) to depict the Proposed Action as described in Section 1.3 of the EA pursuant to 49 USC §§ 40103(b) and 47107(a)(16).
- B. Determination under 49 USC § 44502(b) that the airport development is reasonably necessary for use in air commerce or in the interests of national defense.
- C. Determinations under 49 USC §§ 47106 and 47107 relating to the eligibility of the Proposed Action for federal funding under the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) and/or determinations under 49 USC § 40117, as implemented by 14 CFR § 158.25, to impose and use Passenger Facility Charges (PFCs) collected at the Airport to assist with construction of potentially eligible development items shown on the ALP, including the proposed construction of the Proposed Action that may directly or indirectly impact FAA facilities including, but not limited to, utility relocations.
- D. The following determination is prescribed by the statutory provisions set forth in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018, H. R. 302, (P.L. 115-254), Section 163: FAA has determined that the proposed project will materially impact the safe and efficient operation of aircraft at, to, or from the Airport due to the proposed alteration of Runway 17R/35L, Taxiways A and M, the Runway 35L perimeter road, and the proposed relocation and new installation of navigational aids associated with the proposed project. Therefore, the FAA retains the legal authority to approve or disapprove changes to the ALP to reflect the proposed project.
- E. Amend all necessary air traffic procedures to accommodate the Proposed Action, including Instrument Landing System (ILS) Runway 35L Special Authorization (SA) Category (CAT) II with three lines of minima, the Straight-in (S)-ILS Decision Altitude (DA), the S-Localizer (LOC) Minimum Decent Altitude (MDA), and Circling.
- F. Upgrade ILS and install new Precision Approach Path Indicators (PAPI) on Runway 17R.
- G. Install new Runway 35L Medium Intensity Approach Lighting System with Runway Alignment Indicator Lights (MALSR) and ILS. Relocate Runway 35L PAPI.
- H. Install new Runway 17R, Runway 35L, and midpoint Runway Visual Range (RVR).

### **4. PURPOSE AND NEED**

Pursuant to the NEPA implementing regulations and FAA Orders 1050.1F and 5050.4B, an EA must include a description of the purpose of a proposed action and the reasons it is needed. Section 2 of the EA addresses the Proposed Action's purpose and need.

## 4.1 Purpose

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to enable the air carrier and cargo aircraft to operate at or closer to full payload during those periods of warmer temperatures.<sup>1</sup>

## 4.2 Need

The proposed extension of Runway 17R/35L to the south has been substantiated through separate planning analyses; the 2010 Airport Master Plan Update and the Benefit Cost Analysis (BCA) prepared for the Airport in 2019.<sup>2</sup> The assessment of future runway length was determined using FAA's Advisory Circular (AC) 150/5325-4B, *Runway Length Requirements for Runway Design*.

Runway 17R/35L is the longest runway at the Airport and serves as the primary runway for air carrier and cargo aircraft. About eight percent of the aircraft currently operating at the Airport require a runway length of more than the existing 8,301-foot runway length when operating at or close to full payload (see Table 2-3), especially on days with warmer temperatures. The mean daily maximum temperature for its hottest month (July) is 97 degrees Fahrenheit.<sup>3</sup> The Airport has a reference elevation of 36 feet above mean sea level and the gradient of the runway is 0.1 percent.<sup>4</sup>

Warmer air means less dense air, which has significant effects on an aircraft's performance;<sup>5</sup> affecting the aircraft's power, thrust, and lift.<sup>6</sup> During these warm temperature days, commercial and cargo aircraft must reduce payload (e.g., sell fewer seats or unload cargo) or cancel operations. This could result in aircraft that require longer runway departure lengths to incur payload penalties to serve existing and potential destinations, which could result in the potential loss of service if the payload penalties result in unprofitable operations for Airport customers. The runway length analysis from the 2010 Airport Master Plan Update recommended an extension to one of the existing runways to provide an overall takeoff length of 9,400 feet. This was based on an analysis using the FAA Airport Design software program. The 2019 BCA analyzed required runway length for the extension to Runway 17R/35L using Airport Planning Manuals for six aircraft types (mainly cargo aircraft), at both maximum takeoff weights (MTOW) and operating takeoff weights based on likely haul routes. The BCA concluded that the proposed runway extension to 9,400 feet "will be sufficient to allow for increased capacity for current airport operations, as well as accommodate the projected future growth of the airport."<sup>7</sup>

Table 2-3, of the EA summarizes the runway length calculations for the aircraft included in the BCA, as well as other aircraft currently operating at the Airport. Runway length for each aircraft was based on their manufacturer Airport Planning Manual's hottest temperature takeoff length

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<sup>1</sup> According to FAA Density Altitude, the warmer the air is, the less dense it becomes, and the density of air has significant effects on an aircraft's performance. According to FAA Pilot's Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge, "As air becomes less dense, it reduces power because the engine takes in less air, thrust because the propeller is less efficient in this air, and lift because the thin air exerts less force on the airfoils."

<sup>2</sup> Unison Consulting. (2019, June 7). *Valley International Airport, Benefit-Cost Analysis of the Extension of Runway 17R/35L*.

<sup>3</sup> Unison Consulting. (2019, June 7). *Valley International Airport, Benefit-Cost Analysis of the Extension of Runway 17R/35L*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> FAA. (2008). *Density Altitude*, FAA-P-8740-2 • AFS-8, HQ-08561.

<sup>6</sup> FAA. (2016). *Pilot's Handbook of Aeronautical Knowledge*, Chapter 11, *Aircraft Performance*, FAA-H-8083-25B.

<sup>7</sup> Unison Consulting. (2019, June 7). *Valley International Airport, Benefit-Cost Analysis of the Extension of Runway 17R/35L*.

graph available, at MTOW, and model and engine type that yielded the longest runway length. As shown in Table 2-3 of the EA, the longest runway needed to allow air carrier and cargo aircraft to operate without payload reductions is about 12,500 feet for the MD DC-10-10 aircraft.

Specifically, cargo operations at the Airport have increased 64 percent between the years of 2014 and 2018,<sup>8</sup> and due to the existing runway length, these cargo operators experience takeoff weight restrictions (see Table 2-3 of the EA). For FedEx, the largest cargo operator at the Airport, the “average cargo payload utilization of 47.3 percent at the Airport for the first two quarters of 2018 is lower than FedEx’s system wide payload utilization factor of 53.9 percent for the entire 2018.”<sup>9</sup> FedEx stated that extending Runway 17R/35L to the south for a total runway length of 9,400 feet would result in an increase in cargo payload utilization from 47 percent to 70 percent.<sup>10</sup> As noted in the BCA, a 12,800-foot runway would eliminate operating restrictions for all aircraft operating at the Airport; however, this length of runway might not be the most cost-effective runway length. Additional factors were considered to determine if the proposed 1,099-foot extension from the Master Plan Update and ALP was still needed.

## 5. ALTERNATIVES

Runways are a critical part of an airport. It is important to provide runway lengths that meet existing and future aircraft operational demand. Six alternatives for extending runways at the Airport to achieve the Purpose and Need were identified and taken through the screening process. Each alternative is described in detail below and Table 3-1 of the EA provides an overview of the screening process for all alternatives. The alternatives screening used a two-level screening process. Level 1 screening considered the ability of the alternative to meet the stated Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action. Level 2 screening evaluated alternatives in terms of constructability. Those alternatives that satisfied both Level 1 screening and Level 2 screening criteria were carried forward for detailed evaluation in this EA.

The Level 1 screening evaluated each alternative’s ability to satisfy the Purpose and Need of the Proposed Action. The ability of the Airport to accommodate air carrier and cargo aircraft without needing to reduce payload on warm weather days was part of the evaluation of the Purpose and Need.

The Level 2 screening analysis was designed to determine which alternatives would be considered reasonable in terms of constructability. Each alternative that was advanced to Level 2 screening was reviewed to determine the constructability of extending a runway, which requires consideration of land acquisition, construction phasing, and construction impacts, including infrastructure improvements.

### 5.1 Alternative 1: Extend Runway 17R/35L 1,099 feet to the North

Level 1 - This alternative would construct a 1,099-foot runway extension to Runway 17R/35L to the north for a total runway length of 9,400 feet (see Figure 3-1 of the EA). This alternative met the Level 1 screening criteria regarding Purpose and Need (to accommodate air carrier and cargo

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

aircraft at or close to full payload), and as a result, Alternative 1 was advanced to Level 2 screening.

Level 2 - As described in the 2019 Benefit Cost Analysis (BCA) report,<sup>11</sup> there are challenges with extending the runway this direction. The first being there are both commercial (e.g., gas station, dance hall, etc.) and residential properties that would need to be acquired and relocated to accommodate the runway extension, specifically the runway protection zone (RPZ) (see Figure 3-1 of the EA). Another challenge is the extensive drainage improvements that would need to occur to accommodate the runway extension. An Airport owned and maintained open drainage channel is currently located approximately 225 feet from the end of Runway 17R. This channel is the primary drainage system for the Airport terminal, aircraft rescue and firefighting (ARFF) station, maintenance facility, and rental car service/storage facility. The runway extension would require enclosing the open channel and modifying the system to allow multiple airfield crossings without affecting the capacity of the system. Additionally, the existing MALSR would need to be relocated to accommodate the runway extension, and all of the utilities would also need relocated. Finally, Farm to Market Road (FM) 508 would need to be relocated to accommodate the runway extension and RPZ. As a result of these constructability issues, Alternative 1 was eliminated from further consideration.

## **5.2 Alternative 2: Extend Runway 17R/35L 1,099 feet to the South (Proposed Action)**

Level 1 - Under Alternative 2, Runway 17R/35L would be extended 1,099 feet to the south for a total runway length of 9,400 feet (see Figure 3-2). This alternative met the Level 1 screening criteria regarding Purpose and Need (to accommodate air carrier and cargo aircraft at or close to full payload), and as a result, Alternative 2 was advanced to Level 2 screening.

Level 2 - The extension would occur entirely on land owned by the Airport, including the RPZ. Extensive drainage improvements are also not required with this alternative; however, drainage culverts will be needed for the one open channel in the project area. Due to the lack of constructability issues associated with this alternative, Alternative 2 was retained for further consideration.

## **5.3 Alternative 3: Extend Runway 17R/35L to the North and South**

Level 1 - This alternative would extend Runway 17R end by 549.5 feet and Runway 35L end by 549.5 feet for a total runway length of 9,400 feet (see Figure 3-3 of the EA). This alternative met the Level 1 screening criteria regarding Purpose and Need (to accommodate air carrier and cargo aircraft at or close to full payload), and as a result, Alternative 3 was advanced to Level 2 screening.

Level 2 - As described in Alternative 1, there are many constructability challenges with extending the runway to the north. Properties (residences and commercial businesses) and land would need to be acquired and the residences and commercial businesses would need to be relocated to accommodate the runway extension, specifically the RPZ (see Figure 3-3 of the EA). In addition, extensive drainage improvements would need to occur to accommodate the runway

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<sup>11</sup> Unison Consulting. (2019, June 7). *Valley International Airport, Benefit-Cost Analysis of the Extension of Runway 17R/35L*.

extension to the north (see Section 3.3.1 of the EA), as well as the relocation of the existing MALSR, all utilities, and FM 508. Extending both ends of the runway would result in construction occurring in two phases to preserve the operational capability of the runway. As a result of these constructability issues, Alternative 3 was eliminated from further consideration.

#### **5.4 Alternative 4: Extend Runway 13/31 2,143 feet to the Southeast**

Level 1 - This alternative would extend Runway 13/31 to the southeast by 2,143 feet for a total runway length of 9,400 feet (see Figure 3-4 of the EA). This alternative met the Level 1 screening criteria regarding Purpose and Need (to accommodate air carrier and cargo aircraft at or close to full payload), and as a result, Alternative 4 was advanced to Level 2 screening.

Level 2 - This alternative would require land acquisition, specifically for the RPZ (see Figure 3-4 of the EA). This alternative would require a longer extension. As with Alternatives 1 and 3, extensive drainage improvements would need to occur to accommodate the runway extension, as there is an Airport owned and maintained open drainage channel that would need to be closed and modified to allow for multiple airfield crossings without affecting the capacity of the system. Additionally, Runway 13/31 does not currently have any NAVAID equipment and also does not have a full parallel taxiway. All NAVAID equipment would need to be installed with this alternative and a full parallel taxiway would need to be constructed. With the full parallel taxiway, this alternative would result in additional runway crossings<sup>12</sup> at the intersections of Runways 17L/35R and 17R/35L. Bob Youker Street would also need to be relocated to accommodate the runway extension and RPZ, which would also result in modification to the adjacent non-Airport owned and maintained irrigation canal. As a result of these constructability issues, Alternative 4 was eliminated from further consideration.

#### **5.5 Alternative 5: Extend Runway 13/31 2,143 feet to the Northwest**

Level 1 - This alternative would extend Runway 13/31 to the northwest by 2,143 feet for a total runway length of 9,400 feet (see Figure 3-5 of the EA). This alternative met the Level 1 screening criteria regarding Purpose and Need (to accommodate air carrier and cargo aircraft at or close to full payload), and as a result, Alternative 5 was advanced to Level 2 screening.

Level 2 - This alternative would require land acquisition from the Marine Military Academy and Physical Development Complex (see Figure 3-5 of the EA). This alternative requires a longer extension. As with Alternatives 1, 3, 4 and 5, this alternative would also require extensive drainage improvements to accommodate the runway extension as there is an Airport owned and maintained open drainage channel that would need to be closed and modified to allow for multiple airfield crossings without affecting the capacity of the system. Similar to Alternative 4, Runway 13/31 does not have any NAVAID equipment and also does not have a full parallel taxiway. All NAVAID equipment would need to be installed with this alternative and a full parallel taxiway would need to be constructed. With the full parallel taxiway, this alternative would result in an additional runway crossing<sup>13</sup> at the intersections of Runways 17L/35R and 17R/35L. To accommodate the full parallel taxiway, the Marine Military Academy and Physical Development Complex's obstacle training course would need to be relocated. FM 507 would

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<sup>12</sup> FAA. (2014, February 26). FAA Advisory Circular (AC) 150/5300-13A, Change 1, *Airport Design*. Section 401(5) C and D.

<sup>13</sup> FAA. (2014, February 26). FAA Advisory Circular (AC) 150/5300-13A, Change 1, *Airport Design*. Section 401(5) C and D.

also need to be relocated to accommodate the runway extension and RPZ, which would also result in the modification to the adjacent non-Airport owned and maintained irrigation canal. As a result of these constructability issues, Alternative 5 was eliminated from further screening.

### **5.6 Alternative 6: No Action Alternative**

Under the No Action Alternative, the Airport would not extend Runway 17R/35L. The Airport would continue to operate and serve forecast aviation demands with existing facilities. The No Action Alternative does not meet the project purpose and need (Level 1 screening criteria); however, in addition to being a Council on Environmental Quality/National Environmental Policy Act (CEQ/NEPA) requirement, it does serve as a baseline for a comparison of impacts to the preferred alternative and therefore, retained for analysis.

## **6. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

The environmental impacts, if any, of the proposed alternatives were examined in the attached EA according to FAA Orders 5050.4B and 1050.1F. The environmental impacts of the No Action and the Proposed Action alternatives are summarized in this section.

The analysis included in Section 4 of the attached EA demonstrates that many resource categories will not be impacted by implementation of the Proposed Action. In particular, Section 4.3 of the EA indicates that the following resource categories were not evaluated further in the EA because the resources were not located in proximity to the proposed project area: Coastal Resources; Department of Transportation Section 4(f); Farmlands; Visual Effects; Floodplains; and Wild and Scenic Rivers. In addition, other resource categories will not be discussed in detail in this FONSI/ROD because, as documented in Section 4 of the EA, there is not the potential for significant impact (see FAA Order 1050.1F, Paragraph 4-3.3 and Exhibit 4-1 for information on significance thresholds and factors to consider in evaluating significance for an environmental impact category). These categories include: Biological Resources, including Fish, Wildlife, and Plants; Climate; Water Resources, including, Wetlands, Surface Waters, and Groundwater; Hazardous Materials, Solid Waste, and Pollution Prevention; Historical, Architectural, Archaeological, and Cultural Resources; Land Use; Socioeconomic Impacts, including Environmental Justice and Children's Environmental Health and Safety Risks; and Natural Resources and Energy Supply.

Implementation of the proposed action has the potential to impact the following resource categories:

### **6.1 Air Quality**

Federally-supported or obligated actions occurring in areas designated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as nonattainment or maintenance of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) must comply with the General Conformity Regulations (40 CFR §93.150 et seq.) associated with the federal Clean Air Act. HRL is located in Cameron County, which is designated by the EPA as being in attainment of all criteria pollutants.

### **6.1.1 No-Action Alternative**

No development would occur on the project site with the No-Action Alternative; therefore, there would be no construction air emissions and no changes in operational air emissions. There would be no significant impact on air quality under the No Action alternative.

### **6.1.2 Proposed Action**

Construction of the Proposed Action would result in temporary construction related emissions; however, Cameron County is in attainment for all NAAQS. Additionally, the Airport Sponsor coordinated the Proposed Project with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), who has regulatory oversight for air quality in Texas, and determined that general conformity requirements do not apply to the Proposed Action (see Appendix C of the EA).

Operation of the Proposed Action would not introduce new aircraft or operations to the Airport but would allow aircraft currently operating at the Airport to operate at or close to full payload during those periods of warmer temperatures. Because the General Study Area is in attainment for all criteria pollutants, and the TCEQ determined that the Proposed Action was not subject to general conformity requirements (see Appendix C of the EA), there would be no adverse effect to air quality.

As described above, the Proposed Action would not affect air quality, and therefore, conforms to the State Implementation Plan. In the absence of potentially significant effects, mitigation measures are not proposed. Although the Proposed Action would not cause a significant effect to air quality, the construction contractor would conduct construction activities in accordance with FAA Advisory Circular 150/5370-10H, *Standard Specifications for Construction of Airports*. Additionally, best management practices (BMPs) could be implemented to help reduce emissions associated with construction vehicles and equipment during the construction periods. There would be no significant impact on air quality under the Proposed Action alternative.

## **6.2 Noise and Compatible Land Use**

Figure 4-3 of the EA displays the 65-75 dB Day-Night Average Sound Level (DNL) noise contours for the 2019 Existing Conditions over a map of the existing land use in the General Study Area. The map also shows individual noise sensitive locations such as schools and places of worship. The FAA's guidelines for land use compatibility presented in Appendix A of 14 CFR Part 150 state that all land uses are generally compatible with aircraft noise below 65 dB DNL. Except for the area north of Runway 17L, the 65 dB DNL noise contour is within Airport property. In this area, the 65 dB DNL noise contour extends approximately half a mile into the Cullen-Thompson Reservoir, which is classified as agricultural land. The very tip of the 70 dB DNL noise contour north of Runway 17L also extends into the reservoir area just beyond the Airport boundary. Additionally, south of Runway 35R, the 65 dB DNL noise contour extends just past the southern periphery of the Airport property into agricultural land. The same contour also extends into agricultural land just southeast of the end of Runway 35L.

### **6.2.1 No-Action Alternative**

Under the 2024 and 2029 No Action Alternative, the Airport would not implement the runway extension. The Airport would continue to operate and serve forecast aviation demands. There

would be no significant impact on noise and compatible land use under the No Action alternative.

## **6.2.2 Proposed Action**

### *6.2.2.1 Year of Implementation (2024)*

The year 2024 represents the opening year for the Proposed Action. Figure 4-5 of the EA shows the DNL contours for the 2024 Proposed Action. The majority of the 65 dB DNL noise contour lies within Airport property, with an extension north of the end of Runway 17L over the Cullen-Thompson Reservoir. The 65 dB DNL noise contour to the east of the Runway end 35L extension extends to the Airport perimeter road and south almost to Rio Hondo Road.

Table 4-3 of the EA provides the population exposure, housing unit count, and acreage associated with 65+ dB DNL noise contours for the 2024 Proposed Action. It shows that there are no residents or housing units in the 65+ dB DNL noise contours. The total area for all the 2024 Proposed Action 65+ dB DNL noise contours is 705.84 acres. No individual noise sensitive locations such as residences, schools, or religious institutions are within the 65+ dB DNL noise contours for the 2024 Proposed Action.

The area of the DNL noise contours would increase by 14.5 acres under the 2024 Proposed Action compared to the 2024 No Action Alternative. No change in population or housing units within the 65-75 dB DNL noise contours would occur between the 2024 No Action Alternative and 2024 Proposed Action.

Figure 4-6 of the EA shows the grid points that would see a change in DNL when comparing the modeling results for the 2024 No Action Alternative and 2024 Proposed Action. With the implementation of the Proposed Action, 65 grid points within the 65 dB DNL noise contour near the end of Runway 35L would experience an increase of 1.5 dB or more; four of these grid points are located just off the Airport property to the east of the proposed runway extension, along the perimeter road. Two grid points in the 75 dB DNL noise contour would experience an increase of 1.5 dB or more. Two grid points just outside the 65 dB DNL noise contour would experience a 3 dB increase or more compared to the No Action Alternative. Five grid points within the 75 dB DNL noise contour and two in the 70 dB DNL noise contour would experience a 1.5 dB decrease. None of these affected grid points affect residential or other noise sensitive locations. As such, there would not be a significant noise impact as a result of the Proposed Action in 2024.

### *6.2.2.2 Five Years After Implementation (2029)*

The year 2029 represents five years after opening year for the Proposed Action. Figure 4-8 of the EA shows the 2029 Proposed Action DNL noise contours. The majority of the 65 dB DNL noise contour lies within Airport property, with an extension north of Runway end 17L over the reservoir. The 65 dB DNL noise contour to the east of the Runway end 35L extension extends east out to the Airport perimeter road and south almost to Rio Hondo Road and the 65 dB contour extends just past the Airport property south of Runway end 35R.

Table 4-5 of the EA provides the population exposure, housing unit count, and acreage associated with 65+ dB DNL noise contours for the 2029 Proposed Action. It shows that there are no residents or no housing units in the 65+ dB DNL noise contours. The total area for all the 2029 Proposed Action DNL noise contours is 718.10 acres. No individual noise sensitive locations such as schools or religious institutions lie within the 65+ dB DNL noise contours for the 2029 Proposed Action.

With the 2029 Proposed Action DNL noise contours, the area would increase by 14.4 acres as compared to the 2029 No Action Alternative. No change in population within the 65-75 dB DNL noise contours would occur. No individual noise sensitive locations such as schools or religious institutions are within the 65+ dB DNL contours for either the 2029 No Action Alternative or the 2029 Proposed Action. As such, there would not be a significant noise impact as a result of the Proposed Action in 2029.

Figure 4-9 of the EA shows the grid points that would see a change in DNL when comparing the modeling results for the 2029 No Action Alternative and 2029 Proposed Action. With the implementation of the 2029 Proposed Action, 60 grid points within the 65 dB DNL or greater noise contours near the end of Runway 35L would experience an increase of 1.5 dB or more; four of these grid points are located just off the Airport property to the east of the proposed runway extension. Two grid points in the 60 dB DNL noise contour would experience a 3 dB increase or more compared to the No Action alternative. Seven grid points within the 75 dB DNL noise contour and two in the 70 dB DNL noise contour would experience a 1.5 dB decrease.

The area that would experience an increase in noise level due to the Proposed Action falls nearly entirely within the Airport property lines, with only a small area east of the extension lying outside of Airport property. Additionally, no noise sensitive sites fall within the 65+ dB DNL noise contours and there are no residents or housing units affected by the Proposed Action in either 2024 or 2029. Therefore, there would be no significant impact on air quality under the Proposed Action alternative and no noise mitigation measures are necessary for the Proposed Action.

## **7. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND AGENCY COORDINATION**

### **7.1 Public Involvement**

The Airport Sponsor published a notice of availability for the Draft EA in Valley Morning Star on Monday, April 26, 2021. As Table 5-2 of the EA shows, the Draft EA was made available to the public and agencies for a 30-day review period (30 days after the notice of availability advertisement) at the Airport Administration Office during normal business hours, on the Airport website (<http://www.flythevalley.com/>), and at a local library. Agency and public comments were due no later than 5:00 PM Central Daylight Time (CDT) on May 26, 2021. Written comments on the Draft EA were submitted to Ms. Julie Barrow, on behalf of the Airport, via email at [julie.barrow@rsandh.com](mailto:julie.barrow@rsandh.com) or via U.S. Mail at 4582 South Ulster Street, Suite 1100, Denver, CO 80237. The Airport received a total of three agency comment submissions on the Draft EA. A copy of the comments and responses to those comments are provided in Appendix G of the EA. No public comments were received.

## 7.2 Agency Coordination

Agencies listed in Table 5-1 of the EA were sent an initial agency coordination package that provided details on the individual components of the Proposed Action and provided the opportunity to comment (see Appendix C of the EA). The agency comments received in response to the initial coordination letters are reflected in Appendix G of the EA.

Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the Texas Historical Commission, was initiated on March 15, 2019 with a no historic properties affected determination for the Proposed Action, and concurrence with that determination was received from the SHPO on March 27, 2019. However, subsequent consultation with the SHPO was initiated by the FAA with a no historic properties affected determination on December 14, 2020 because the APE grew in size due to the addition of NAVAIDS associated with the Proposed Action. Subsequent concurrence that the increase in size of the APE would not change the original finding of no historic properties present or affected was received from the SHPO on December 15, 2020. This consultation can be seen in Appendix E.

## 8. CONDITIONS AND MITIGATION

As prescribed by 40 CFR § 1505.3, the FAA shall take steps as appropriate to the action, such as through special conditions in grant agreements, property conveyance deeds, releases, airport layout plan approvals, and contract plans and specifications, and shall monitor these as necessary to assure that representations made in the EA and FONSI will be carried out. Specific conditions of approval associated with this project are listed below:

- The airport will comply with TCEQ's Texas Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Construction General Permit. A Notice of Intent will be required. A Storm water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) will be prepared and implemented, and a construction site notice will be posted on the construction site. The SWPPP will include, among other items, identification of appropriate erosion and sediment controls and storm water best management practices.
- The contractor shall be required to pay special attention to dust control when earthwork or hauling operations are in progress, and/or when wind or weather conditions cause excessive blowing of dust.

## 9. FINDINGS

Throughout the development of the airport, including the proposed improvements described above, the FAA has made every effort to adhere to the policies and purposes of NEPA, as stated in the NEPA implementing regulations. The FAA has concentrated on the truly significant issues related to the action in question. The FAA determined that the Proposed Action is in compliance with FAA Order 1050.1F 6-3.b(2), and is consistent with community planning as documented in the Master Plan<sup>14</sup>. In its determination on whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or process the EA as a FONSI, the FAA weighed its decision based on an examination of

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<sup>14</sup> Valley International Airport. Airport Master Plan Update, August 2010.

the EA, and comments from Federal and state agencies, as well as all other information available to the FAA.

As required by 40 CFR 1506.5, the FAA has independently and objectively evaluated this proposed project. As described in the Final EA, the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative were studied to determine the potential impacts and appropriate mitigation for those impacts. The FAA provided input, advice, and expertise throughout the analysis, along with administrative and legal review of the project.

The following determinations are prescribed by the statutory provisions set forth in the Airport and Airway Improvement Act of 1982, as codified in 49 U.S.C. §§ 47106 and 47107. They are preconditions of FAA's approval of airport funding applications for AIP eligible airport development.

- a. 49 U.S.C. § 47106(a)(1). The Proposed Action is reasonably consistent with existing plans of public agencies for the development of the area surrounding the airport.
- b. 49 U.S.C. § 47106(b)(2). The interests of the communities in or near which the project may be located have been given fair consideration.
- c. 49 U.S.C. § 47107(a)(10). Appropriate action, including the adoption of zoning laws, has been or will be taken to the extent reasonable to restrict the use of land next to or near the airport to uses that are compatible with normal airport operations.

After careful and thorough consideration of the facts contained herein, the undersigned finds that the proposed Federal action is consistent with existing national environmental policies and objectives of Section 101 of NEPA and other applicable environmental requirements and, with the required mitigation referenced above, will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment or otherwise include any condition requiring any consultation pursuant to section 102(2)(C) of NEPA. As a result, FAA has determined that preparation of an EIS is not necessary for this proposed action and is therefore issuing this FONSI.

RECOMMENDED  
FOR APPROVAL:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jesse Carriger  
Manager, Texas Airports  
District Office

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPROVED:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ignacio Flores  
Director, Office of Airports  
Southwest Region

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## DECISION AND ORDER

Runway 17R/35L Extension Project  
Valley International Airport  
Harlingen, Texas

June 2021

The FAA has identified the Proposed Action as the FAA's preferred alternative. FAA must now select one of the following courses of action:

- a. Approve agency actions necessary to implement the Proposed Project, or
- b. Disapprove agency actions to implement the Proposed Project.

Approval would signify that applicable Federal requirements relating to airport development and planning have been met and would permit Valley International Airport to proceed with implementation of the Proposed Action and associated mitigation measures. Disapproving these agency actions would prevent the Proposed Action from being implemented.

I have carefully considered the FAA's goals and objectives in relation to the various aeronautical aspects of the Proposed Project as discussed in the EA. The review included: the purpose and need that this project would serve; the alternative means of achieving the purpose and need; the environmental impacts of these alternatives; and mitigation of impacts. The review concluded that all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the selected alternative have been adopted.

Under the authority delegated by the Administrator of the FAA, the undersigned finds that the Proposed Action, Runway 17R/35L Extension, is reasonably supported. Therefore, the following agency actions, discussed more fully in the FONSI, are directed to be taken including:

1. The FAA directs that actions be taken to:
  - A. Unconditional approval of the Airport Layout Plan (ALP) to depict the Proposed Action as described in Section 1.3 of the EA pursuant to 49 USC §§ 40103(b) and 47107(a)(16).
  - B. Determination under 49 USC § 44502(b) that the airport development is reasonably necessary for use in air commerce or in the interests of national defense.
  - C. Determinations under 49 USC §§ 47106 and 47107 relating to the eligibility of the Proposed Action for federal funding under the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) and/or determinations under 49 USC § 40117, as implemented by 14 CFR § 158.25, to impose and use Passenger Facility Charges (PFCs) collected at the Airport to assist with construction of potentially eligible development items shown on the ALP including the proposed construction of

the Proposed Action that may directly or indirectly impact FAA facilities including but not limited to utility relocations.

- D. The following determination is prescribed by the statutory provisions set forth in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018, H. R. 302, (P.L. 115-254), Section 163: FAA has determined that the proposed project will materially impact the safe and efficient operation of aircraft at, to, or from the airport due to the proposed alteration of Runway 17R/35L, Taxiways A and M, the Runway 35L perimeter road and the proposed relocation and new installation of navigational aids associated with the proposed project. Therefore, the FAA retains the legal authority to approve or disapprove changes to the ALP to reflect the proposed project.
- E. Amend all necessary air traffic procedures to accommodate the Proposed Action, including Instrument Landing System (ILS) Runway 35L Special Authorization (SA) Category (CAT) II with three lines of minima, the Straight-in (S)-ILS Decision Altitude (DA), the S-Localizer (LOC) Minimum Decent Altitude (MDA), and Circling.
- F. Upgrade ILS and install new Precision Approach Path Indicators (PAPI) on Runway 17R.
- G. Install new Runway 35L Medium Intensity Approach Lighting System with Runway Alignment Indicator Lights (MALSR) and ILS. Relocate Runway 35L PAPI.
- H. Install new Runway 17R, Runway 35L, and midpoint Runway Visual Range (RVR).

The FAA has carefully and thoroughly considered the facts contained in the attached EA. Based on that information, FAA finds the proposed Federal actions are consistent with existing national environmental policies and objectives of Section 101(a) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and other applicable environmental requirements. The FAA also finds the proposed Federal action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment or include any condition requiring any consultation pursuant to section 102(2)(C) of NEPA. As a result, FAA will not require an EIS for this action.

The undersigned, therefore, now approves and directs action as needed, to carry out the agency action outlined above under Proposed FAA Actions required for the Runway 17R/35L Extension Project described under the Proposed Action in the attached EA and this FONSI/ROD. These actions are directed to be taken, and determinations and approvals are made, under the authority of 49 U.S.C. §§ 40101, 40113, 44502, 44701, 47101, 47105, 47106, 47107, 47120, and 47122.

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Rob Lowe  
Regional Administrator  
Southwest Region

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Date

### **Right of Appeal**

This order (FONSI/ROD) constitutes final agency action and final order of the Administrator under 49 U.S.C. § 46110. Any party having a substantial interest in this order may appeal this order to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit or in the Circuit Court of Appeals of the United States for the circuit in which the person resides or has its principal place of business, upon petition, filed no later than 60 days after the order is issued in accordance with the provisions of 49 U.S.C. § 46110.