

Talking points to the Pierce County Council, Economic and Infrastructure Development Committee meeting, listening session concerning the 24-hour gate policy in place at Thun Field, soon to be applied to Tacoma Narrows Airport.

February 24, 2015, 9:30 a.m.

Good Morning, my name is Michael Thompson, owner of AVSTAR Aircraft of Washington, Inc., at Thun Field. I came to speak with you this morning concerning the poorly conceived notion and application of 24-hour security gates at the Pierce County Airports.

My research of applicable standards for airport security, taken from the TSA's guide to airport security, plainly states that there is not a one size fits all approach to airport security. Each airport must be looked at individually and security measures taken that fit the situation.

The airport administration has ignored that key tenant of security, and in a push to get security, ended up with nothing more than 24-hour gates with a host of problems. This was first pointed out by myself to the airport administrator on September 17 of last year; nothing to enhance either access to businesses, attempting to gain security, or a meeting to discuss, find and implement a compromise that will meet intended goals has been accomplished in the five months passed.

The airport administrator has gone on record that there is no federal, state or county law that requires any form of security on the airports. The airport rules and regulations even agree with that; in the rules and regulations set to be adopted when Ordinance 2014-108s is brought to full council vote, under the heading of Security Requirements – and I quote: **Tenants and pilots are responsible for the security of aircraft and other private property entrusted to their care on their Airport leased areas of responsibility** – end quote. However, Ms Wallace said in her opening remarks the county 'must supply a level of security to tenants and prospective tenants.'

The airport master plans for both Thun Field and Tacoma Narrows Airport were checked for reference to security or gate implementation. The Thun Field master plan, dated 1999, states this: **Perimeter fencing, gates, and terminal fencing between airport property and public areas are recommended to discourage access of people and wildlife to the runways and taxiways. For general aviation airports such as Pierce County, the specific location, type and height normally depends upon local security requirements and fencing established by adjacent property owners; otherwise, the fence line normally follows the property line. Fencing locations and types recommended at Pierce County are shown on the Airport Layout and Terminal Area Drawings.** However, when looking at those drawings, although in the legend, I'll be darned if I can spot them, although they are poor drawing quality as viewed on the internet.

The Tacoma Narrows Airport master plan, still showing as a draft pending your approval, states this: **"The Airport is fenced with restricted access gates to enhance security. The presence of staff at the Air Traffic Control Tower, FBOs, and other businesses also enhances security."** Looking at the maps, the Airport Layout Plan and the Terminal Area Plan both show the TIW fence to pretty much be on the north and east boundary's of the airport, with nothing on the west and south boundary's. The south end of the Narrows Airport is pretty much inaccessible unless by boat then rock-climbing gear, but the west side has no fence, plainly seen on the plans as commissioned by the airport administrator.

So, if the fencing is to follow the property line, as suggested in the Thun plan, we need additional fencing and a single properly placed gate. This would follow the plan guidelines. The same application should be made at Tacoma Narrows: complete the perimeter fencing, install a single gate at the central terminal area on the property line. Objections to those ideas would then not only come from those of us who chose to be here today, but from many more users of the airports. This complete fencing of the airports is not going to happen, so I leave you this morning with the question: Why is fair application of complete security policy is set aside for an unfair application of a gate-only policy?

I encourage a return to normalcy, and get the gates open during business hours. As stated in the Tacoma Narrows master plan: **The presence of staff at the Air Traffic Control Tower, FBOs, and other businesses also enhances security.** May I also add pilots to that list; as a group disciplined enough to complete flight training, they are a cut-above the general public.

Thank you

Michael Thompson

Follow-up comments concerning the Pierce County Council, Economic and Infrastructure Development Committee meeting, listening session concerning the 24-hour gate policy in place at Thun Field, soon to be applied to Tacoma Narrows Airport, held February 24, 2015, 9:30 a.m.

During Ms Wallace's opening statement, which she was allowed 15 minutes to make, she made the following comments that I would like to challenge:

1. She mentioned a 2011 security survey, but did not provide data to back it up.
2. She mentioned that there are 600+ parties on the interested parties email list. As this list is an opt-in list, chances are very good that 75% of folks that had opted-in read the email announcement of the current airport survey with the remaining 25% not being available to read it due to being away from email, incapacitated, or the like. Of an opt-in list, again a large percentage would likely immediately click the link to have taken the survey that was advertised in the announcement as "a brief survey". According to the survey results, only there were 177 total respondents. I hereby second the motion that county communication is the most needed item the administration should address.
3. Referencing the gate transaction data for Thun Field; it was explained that there have been nearly 18,000 folks visit the airport since the gates went 24-hour. The number is actually much larger than that due to the piggy-backing through the gates, as well as the folks that visit the airport without going through the security, like to Spencers/Simflight, Spanaflight, the Hangar Inn, etc.
4. She represented that the staff assisted my company with access to the construction crews for my new building. This is a half-truth, at best; in reality, we had a special gate code assigned for use by the construction crews. Nothing substantial was done to eliminate all the denials due to apparent entry errors when in fact other folks here were experiencing similar errors, likely the same rate, we experience more due to volume.
5. She mentioned less garbage problems since the 24-hour gate implementation.. This might be true of dumpster usage, however, since the on-station county personnel changes were made in 2013, the general cleanliness of the airport due to debris accumulation earns a poor grade.
6. Another alleged incident of a race on the runway was brought up, referring to this happening last year in a BMW. Ms Wallace continues to state that although this doesn't happen on a regular basis, this is a life and security issue, and one time that it causes an incident will be too many. In theory, I agree 100%; therefore, let the council also enact a new policy to drive on Meridian Avenue East a very dangerous road as it passes by Thun Field, to wit: "Every stop light has a breathalyzer. Blow under 0.08 for a green light. One car per green light." That is silly, you cannot protect people from themselves. But yet, Ms Wallace's efforts are to punish the folks that desire to use the airports as they are intended, because, and let's not forget: "Every other airport does this"
7. Ms Wallace went on to acknowledge she has been asked to negotiate the hours or need for the 24-hour gates, but yet in the past, she argued that she had never been asked. These continual delay tactics are getting very old. Does she believe that if this drags out long enough we'll either throw up our hands in agreement or get used to this being the way it is? (My choice, as well as I am sure other business people, would not be abandon our investments.) Now, she claims she is not in a position to negotiate as she is doing the best job she can for the county and that would not include negotiating a life and safety issue. Fact: Mr. Roach suggested very strongly this gets negotiated in a letter he wrote to the Thun Field Advisory Commission dated 12/16/2014 "...I plan to schedule a Council study session on the gate access issue, **if needed**. Such a study session will give the Thun Field Advisory Commission, airport businesses, and the public an opportunity to address the Council on the issue and will be useful to me in determining

if a resolution regarding gate access should be introduced.” Emphasis added, but that sound to me like a ‘work it out, folks’ type of statement. Second Fact: Ms McCarthy stated in an email of February 6 “I believe access for your customers and visitors can be addressed when **all parties work together to find solutions**. There could be many approaches **such as opening the gate during business hours** and restrictions on off hours...I don't know what those ideas could be and I encourage you to **work with my team** on a collective goal of making our Airport the best it can be which includes the ability to address **safety issues**.” Once again, emphasis is added. By flatly stating she will not negotiate this issue, Ms Wallace is not only ignoring the airport business people, but now, directly the County Council and Executive.

8. Ms Wallace closed her remarks with comments that would lead one to believe this is an all or nothing proposition. That impression is incorrect. As several folks testified in this matter, opening of the gates during business hours is appropriate; to the gentleman that questioned whose business hours, I would have to say that generally accepted hours would be Monday through Friday 8 in the morning to 5 in the afternoon. For my purposes, I would like to see Saturdays and Sundays thrown in also, but I am a realist.
9. Questions arose from the survey. Suffice it to say this was not a scientific survey; it had to be advertised twice due to ‘technical difficulties’, the compilation was incomplete according to Ms Wallace, and the questions asked were leading questions with not much choice for dissention when reviewing possible answers.
10. Ms Wallace also made comment to the ‘15 or 20 seconds required for gate operation’. My office manager took that challenge this morning; she pulled up to the card reader and started a digital stopwatch device she has, and commenced to go through her normal routine of window gate card, wait for gate to open enough to start vehicle motion, drive through, stop and allow the gate to fully close. For the record: Sixty-two seconds.

Regarding comments made by business owners and concerned citizens, I am pleased that a spectrum of folks attended to so you hear some good information and opinion, and have but a few comments concerning those:

Due to Mr. Neil’s hearing impairment, he asked for some latitude, which Mr. Richardson gave him. Although Mr. Neil made some good points, I know he had a couple more to make when he was essentially cut-off; I have encouraged Dan to express his continued thought to you in a follow-up email. As a side note of sorts, I encourage anyone that has a face to face meeting with an individual that reads lips as his/her primary way of communication, to refrain from placing their hand in front of their mouth when speaking; although I am sure Mr. Richardson’s act was unintentional, it did keep Mr. Neil from understanding the request for a summarization.

A clarification I should make to my comments: I referred to the airport master plans; in such I quoted a section of the Pierce County airport master plan dated 1999, wherein it referred to the airport as the Pierce County Airport. This document applied to the airport co-known as Pierce County / Thun Field, and does not refer to the since acquired Tacoma Narrows Airport.

Mr. Jacob stated favoring the 24-hour gate policy as now ‘he doesn’t have to unload his truck at 9 at night, and can go home and sleep well knowing his property is secured.’ I suggest that instead of relying on the county for his security, he can either park inside his building, fence in his own secured parking area, or wake up to the fact that he could get the very same sleep as before, with the dusk to dawn gate policy that we had previously, as his work crew starts their shift at 6:00 in the morning.

Mr. Kaneen (sp?) made (what I thought) were condescending comments about the county never being able to satisfy Mr. Neil; I thought that was inappropriate as Mr. Neil could not respond. Additionally he questioned who's business hours would be used in a 'gate open during business hours' scenario; As I previously stated, conventional hours of 8 to 5 would seem appropriate, but believe me, as a small business owner, my hours are much longer than that.

Mr. Swift made comment of auto traffic 'up and down the tarmac.' This is a design flaw at both airports that can be alleviated. Ms Wallace has supplied a list to you of airports with a 24-hour gate / security policy. If you look at the airports that have this restricted access and businesses inside the fence, the successful airports also have an inside perimeter road so travel can be accomplished successfully and safely, between locations. The fence / access and the road design would require major overhaul at Thun and Tacoma Narrows to accomplish the same task successfully. This overhaul would bear substantial costs.

I believe Mr. Pennycook (sp?) made comment about a keypad / card reader for outbound traffic, to alleviate the weak link of the ground sensors. This combined with the relaxation of gate closure hours is a very good concept: As another benefit, it would all but remove the impossibility of 'blocking' unwanted piggy-backers / tailgaters from passing through. As I mentioned in the past, and can be seen on the aerial photos provided by Ms Wallace, both drive through gates at Thun have splits in the road immediately after entering the 'secured area'; a block cannot be successfully performed.

Mr. Stillwell made a final comment concerning auto traffic on the tarmac witnessed while he was eating dinner at the Hub; this was at a time there was further activity of a medical helicopter and two aide cars performing a transfer. I don't believe it was caught on tape, but I asked Mr. Stillwell the time he dined that evening, he stated it was 8 p.m. If the current 'dusk to dawn' gate policy at Tacoma Narrows is being utilized, then again, nothing can be done about that traffic other than perhaps an armed guard. Unfortunately, when the gates are closed, whether as a 24-hour measure or a dusk to dawn policy, increased ramp traffic – although contrary to the airport rules and regulations – is an unintended consequence.

Later in the day, I reviewed the taped meeting to be sure my notes covered all my items. As I was going to shut it off at roughly the same time we exited, I was briefly distracted, only to come back and realize there were questions posed by Mr. Roach and Mr. McCune to (apparently) Ms Wallace for research.

- Both Mr. Roach and Mr. McCune questioned the timing of the police activity; Ms Wallace has failed to answer that question when directly asked in the past. Also, she avoided a previous follow-up question concerning quantity of these reported incidents inside, as opposed to outside, the alleged secured area. These questions need to be answered, very well, Gentlemen! If any of these occurred inside the 'secured area' during the normal closed cycle of the previous dusk-to-dawn gates, the 24-hour mode would have done absolutely nothing to alleviate them.
- Mr. McCune's question regarding signage at the gates is also one that has been asked before. At Thun, there has been a long-standing sign that 'suspicious activities will be reported' and another that states something along the authorized personnel only message. In September of last year; I made the suggestion that gate operating rules should be posted; Ms Wallace's response was people know what the rules are when they get their card. Interestingly enough, the service company drivers (UPS, FedEx, Garbage, etc) have never seen the rules concerning the gates. I know; I have asked them.

As an informational note, my office manager (at my request) checked the time allotment for this meeting / listening session. Not counting the preliminary's (roll call, etc.), the portion of the meeting dedicated to the gate subject accounted for nearly 79 minutes, of which Ms. Wallace spoke and answered your questions for just over 30 minutes, other pro-24-hour policy folks almost 11 minutes (for a total of 52% of the time), and those against the 24-hour lockdown almost 26 minutes (or 38% of the time). Time and percentages did not include Mr. Taylor's remarks, or discussion by the committee members.

I'll close with these final thoughts that I and others have previously addressed to you concerning why the current 24-hour gate policy is a bad situation for the Pierce County Airports.

- It is an impediment to being able to conduct fair trade, as it discourages potential customers from visiting businesses behind the gate, while directing those customers to the businesses that have unrestricted walk-up access.
- It does nothing to improve security; defects in design, function, and repair of the fencing and gates are still blatant after many months and years of neglect.
- It discourages aspiring aviators from visiting the airport to find out how aviation as a career or as a hobby can benefit them.
- An undercurrent to this policy is the deception passed along concerning crime statistics at the airport locations.
- As a business interruption, a request from the gate call-box can cause an interruption in work / continuity to a project / potential for mistake. I feel this is a far greater risk that an impaired driver finding their way to the airport operations area and driving irresponsibly. As a professional in my arena, I object to the cavalier manner in which Ms Wallace disregards the predicament in which she has placed me, as well as other small business owner behind the fence.
- As a business interruption, the U. S. Postal Service will not go through the closed gate, even if provided a code. This leads many businesses, AVSTAR included, that must make the treacherous drive down Meridian Avenue to the post office, then wait for up to an hour to receive our mail. We are keeping track of this; I suggested in the past that Wings West does the same, for the purpose of submitting an invoice to the county for the monetary loss that can be measured by this gate policy.
- Do we really know who is at the gate asking to be buzzed in?

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Thompson

Employer, taxpayer, concerned citizen, property owner and business owner in Pierce County. (no particular order)

February 25, 2015