WAYPORTS: A CONCEPT WHOSE TIME HAS COME

'Putting the enormous future growth of all segments of aviation into populated areas at tremendous human and financial costs seems unthinkable.'

BY JAMES E. SHEPPARD

A plan is desperately needed to provide massive airport and airspace capacity for the next century. The "wayports" concept, a bold, integrated system approach capable of solving much of America's airport and airspace congestion problems, is such a plan.

Wayports describes a system of four or five strategically positioned airport facilities in rural, unpopulated areas and unused airspace where there would be little opposition or problems with noise and environment. Wayports would cater to those aeronautical activities that are not required to be on large metropolitan airports, such as airline transfers and connections, express and other cargo companies, general aviation and postal service.

One of aviation's worst fears is that it will indefinitely face artificial constraints caused by gridlock and delay such as slots, flow control, reregulation, depeaking, peak-period pricing and banning general aviation. A nationwide solution such as wayports that can be in place before the year 2000 must be adopted now if institutionalized "rationing" of metropolitan airspace and airports is to be avoided.

Developing major new airports in metropolitan areas is apparently futile since none have broken ground in the past 25 years. Even if $25 billion to $30 billion was available for this purpose, public opposition could indefinitely doom or delay new airports. And after all, with an alternative like wayports, why should urban areas be unnecessarily impacted?

Wayports would be true system facilities identified with and located to serve large geographical regions such as West Coast, Southwest, Mid-Continent Southeast and Northeast. Wayports would have almost unlimited long-range airport and airspace capacity since their configurations could be optimized with inexpensive land and airspace. Wayports would be designed for on-ground efficiency with a terminal and transit system that consistently provides 25-minute connections. Security would be greatly enhanced by incorporating the latest features early in the design phase. Maintenance and loading and unloading of passengers and cargo could be accomplished at a single point.

Low-cost rural land would be utilized. Development costs would be less than $1 billion for each wayport due to the minimal initial needs for parking, curbside facilities and highways. These can evolve later along with additional airport capacity as origin/destination passengers increase from urbanization around the wayport. Next-generation runways with state-of-the-art fog, snow and weather facilities could be provided. A dependable reserve of airport and airspace capacity would be available for next-generation aircraft like the proposed hypersonic transport plane and 1-million-pound cargo airlifter. Wayports could be located worldwide and be linked with those in the U.S. to provide new global entrepreneurial opportunities.

Marketing of the wayports concept is very important to its success. The name wayport is one the American public can relate to, one that will capture its imagination. Everyone knows what "Interstate" means. "Wayport" is to the airport system what "Interstate" is to the highway system. The major difference between an airway and a highway is the airway is paved on each end while the highway is paved all the way. Both distribute people and commerce.

Several economic factors make wayports viable without a large origin and destination base. They include: a collection/distribution system using short-haul or tilt-rotor aircraft linked to small airports, global use by next-generation aircraft, and passenger volume, which is forecast to rise to 750 million by the year 2000. In addition, lower development costs will result in lower user fees.

Reducing or eliminating the current $3 billion in direct delay costs to airlines and passengers should certainly be welcomed. Elimination of delay will induce use. Siphoning off some of the transfers from congested hubs into wayports will make the large hubs an attractive place to do business.

Putting the enormous future growth of all segments of aviation into populated areas at tremendous human and financial costs seems unthinkable because wayports is a better alternative. ASM