

# ***CHAPTER 9: AIRPORT AREA***

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## **Overview**

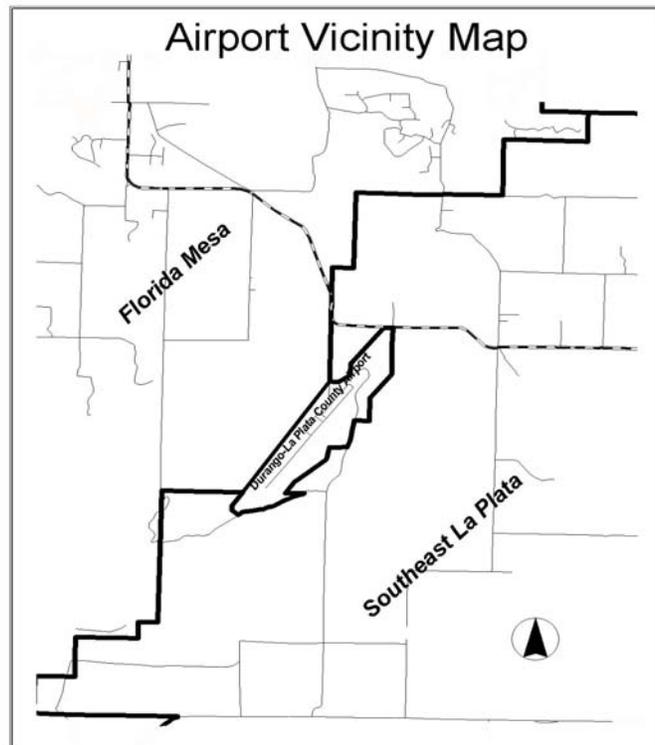
The Durango/La Plata County Airport, located approximately 14 miles southeast of the City of Durango, serves as a regional air facility with scheduled air service to Albuquerque, Denver, Phoenix and, during ski season, to Dallas/Fort Worth. The airport also supports private aviation facilities, air freight operations and an interagency wildfire air tanker base. The airport is jointly owned and operated by La Plata County and the City of Durango. Businesses, local residents and tourists all depend upon the airport as a lifeline to major metropolitan areas and airports around the country. As a result, the airport plays a significant role in the County's economy.

Given the amount of growth and development occurring southeast of Durango on the Florida Mesa, the ***Airport Area Element*** of the comprehensive plan is quite important. It is intended to establish preferred land use types and impact mitigation techniques for properties that currently are, or may be in the future, impacted by airport operations. The airport area, as shown below, includes land located within both the Florida Mesa and Southeast La Plata Planning District.

## **Background**

Land uses around an airport are typically of concern if they pose a safety hazard to residents or are a threat to the continued operation of the facility. In the case of Durango-La Plata Airport, this concern is partially ameliorated by the fact the facility is located on a mesa top, with lands to the east and west located well-below the airport facilities.

Existing land uses in the vicinity are generally mixed, with a significant amount of scattered low-density residential development surrounding the airport to the south and east, and some clustered business development immediately to the north.



***Key Point:*** *Land uses around an airport are typically of concern if they pose a safety hazard to residents or are a threat to the continued operation of the facility.*

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The airport straddles the boundary of the Florida Mesa and Southeast La Plata Planning Districts. As of 2001, only the Florida Mesa District had an adopted land use plan identifying preferred land uses in the District. This plan identified lands directly northwest of the airport as appropriate for agriculture and low-density residential. The balance of lands around the airport are within the Southeast Planning District, and are not designated for any specific use. Development in the Southeast District is based solely on County land use code requirements which are largely based on mitigating impacts and proving compatibility with existing surrounding uses.

The fact that lands surrounding the airport are contained in two separate planning districts and that the Southeast District does not have an adopted land use plan is cause for concern because there is little guidance for decision-makers to determine what may be appropriate in the area.

***Key Point:*** *Lands around the airport that are located within the Southeast Planning District are not designated for any particular use, thus providing little guidance for decision-makers to determine what may be appropriate in the area.*

***Key Point:*** *Due to the unique importance of the airport to the economic health and livability of La Plata County, it is critical that land uses surrounding the airport do not unduly interfere with airport operations.*

### **Airport Area Goals**

**Goal 9.1:** **To Protect the Safety of Persons and Property Surrounding the Airport.**

**Goal 9.2:** **To Protect the Present and Future Operations of the Airport.**

### **Airport Master Plan**

Development of the airport itself is guided by the **Durango – La Plata County Airport Master Plan**. An update of this plan is required on a regular basis by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). An update of the plan is underway in 2001. The master plan is used to determine long term budgets for airport construction and development. All airport facilities including runway, terminal, parking, air cargo and general aviation development are analyzed. The strongest focus of the plan is on airport needs for the next five to seven years. However, given growth trends in the County around the airport, airport planners have been instructed to view the 2001 plan as a final buildout plan. At the request of La Plata County, the plan will include an analysis of issues for lands located outside the airport property that may potentially be impacted by existing or future airport activities.

### **Summary of Goals, Key Points and Plan Recommendations**

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## **Goals**

Goal 9.1: To protect the safety of persons and property surrounding the airport

Goal 9.2: To protect the present and future operations of the airport.

## **Key Points**

The *Key Points* presented in this chapter are summarized below.

- T Land uses around an airport are typically of concern if they pose a safety hazard to residents or are a threat to the continued operation of the facility.
- T Lands around the airport that are located within the Southeast Planning District are not designated for any particular use, thus providing little guidance for decision-makers to determine what may be appropriate in the area.
- T Due to the unique importance of the airport to the economic health and livability of La Plata County it is critical that land uses surrounding the airport do not unduly interfere with airport operations.

## **Plan Recommendations**

Plan recommendations should be implemented through the prioritization and initiation of action items. The *Action Items (AI)* summarized below are incorporated into an *Action Item Prioritization Table* included in Chapter 12.

- AI9.1:** Continue to participate in airport commissions update of airport master plan.
- AI9.2:** Establish an airport “area of influence” around the airport, developing a land use plan for that area that incorporates the needs of the airport facility as well as the concerns of area residents and property owners.
- AI9.3:** In accordance with Colorado Revised Statutes (CRS) 24-65-102(1) adopt “1041 Powers” to regulate land uses around the Durango-La Plata Airport as an area of State interest.
- AI9.4:** Identify and consider adoption of land use code requirements for “avigation” easements.
- AI9.5:** Identify lands surrounding the airport that Airport Commission expects to need for future expansions

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**AI9.6:** Identify and consider establishment of requirements for special construction techniques to be used on projects within the airport area of influence.

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