

May 8, 2007

To: City of Scottsdale Transportation Commission
Chairman Brian Davis
Vice-Chairman Kelly McCall
Mark Gilliland
William Howard
Andrea Michaels
Mathew Taunton
Josh Weiss
City of Scottsdale Staff
Mary O'Connor
Teresa Huish
Dave Meinhart



From: Preservation of Airpark Residential Communities (PARC)

Re: Proposed Thunderbird Road Extension

This information is presented in response to a proposed plan to extend Thunderbird Road from Scottsdale Road to the Loop 101. PARC supports the Scottsdale Airpark and the Scottsdale Municipal Airport and we desire to see both flourish. The objective of PARC is to preserve Thunderbird Road in its current form, and to promote other transportation options that will both benefit the residential neighborhoods surrounding the Airpark, as well as the commercial businesses within the Airpark.

PARC also supports many of the suggestions contained in the draft Scottsdale Airpark Circulation Study dated April 6, 2007, however we oppose any concept which would extend Thunderbird Road from Scottsdale Road to Hayden and/or the Loop 101. There are approximately 3,500 residents in the neighborhoods around the Airpark that would be negatively affected by the proposed extension of Thunderbird Road. Below is the relevant historical and planning information that should frame any decision on this issue.

First, we realize there are no easy solutions for the Transportation Commission and the City of Scottsdale, but we believe the Thunderbird Road option can be eliminated based on the following:

- Over 20 mature neighborhood subdivisions with approximately 1,500 families will be adversely affected by the extension of Thunderbird Road.
- Creation of Thunderbird Road will open up over 5 miles of neighborhood streets to “cut-through” commuter traffic in addition to Thunderbird Road itself. These include an already stressed Sweetwater Avenue, Sutton Drive and 84th Street where traffic calming measures have already been necessary. In addition, existing residential streets would be subject to similar traffic problems including 74th Street, 76th Street, and 78th Street (see aerial photo enclosed).
- Significantly increased vehicle traffic in these neighborhoods will affect the safety and usage by families and children attending three neighborhood schools (Thunderbird Adventist Academy, Sonoran Sky Elementary, Ina Levine Jewish Community Center), as well as the use of Northsight Community Park.
- Existing commercial corridors can be better utilized to solve this problem versus creating a commercial corridor through a residential neighborhood.

Important historical and planning information also supports this position.

1. Planning and Zoning History – Through its various ordinances and General Plan, the City of Scottsdale has longstanding commitments to the neighborhoods surrounding the Scottsdale Airpark, and there has never been any plan, concept or suggestion of extending Thunderbird Road since the creation of the Scottsdale Airpark in 1964. This includes any extension to Hayden when the Airpark was created. Even after the Loop 101 was conceived, there was no plan for Thunderbird Road west of the 101 to be accessed by the freeway. Two ordinances have also been adopted since the creation of the airpark which re-affirm that no vehicles would have access from the airpark to the neighborhood.
2. General Plan – There are numerous policy statements within the 2001 General Plan of Scottsdale which direct that traffic planning should “favor protecting neighborhoods,” “create an environment where neighborhoods can flourish,” and “discourage citywide and regional cut-through automobile traffic.” We recognize there are situations within the City limits that exist where the best of a bad situation is all that can be hoped for. This is not the case for Thunderbird Road. The City of Scottsdale has an opportunity to pursue other options such as expanding Redfield Road and expanding access to Raintree Drive while protecting the surrounding neighborhoods. More importantly, the employment and future growth for the Scottsdale Airpark are projected to occur in the northern portions of the Airpark.

3. Seventh Day Adventist Academy- The Academy is opposed to any extension of Thunderbird Road through their property. There is no right of way for Thunderbird Road through their property, and any right of way would have to be acquired through the condemnation process. A road through the Academy's property would also have an adverse impact on a variety of the existing improvements, including many residences within the Academy.

In short, the City of Scottsdale should conclude there are not only other options to managing traffic in the Airpark, but much better options consistent with its General Plan goals of protecting neighborhoods and limiting commercial traffic to commercial corridors.

Planning and Zoning History

Zoning Ordinances

The approximate 720 acre property now known as the Scottsdale Airpark, was zoned in 1964 to I-1 (zoning case #47-PZ-64) as a result of a P&Z commission initiative, as adopted under Ordinance #219. This included “Thunderbird Field”, and the boundaries of the property were generally Scottsdale Road on the West, Greenway Road on the North, Hayden Road on the East and Thunderbird Road and Sutton Road alignment on the South. (There was no right of way for Thunderbird Road between Scottsdale Road and 76th street). A 200’ Residential Buffer of R1-35 zoning separated the I-1 zoning from the residential neighborhoods.

On June 24, 1966, the City of Scottsdale purchased “Thunderbird Field II” from the Arizona Conference Corporation of Seventh Day Adventists which included among other covenants, a perpetual right of airplane taxi access to the airport.

In 1975, zoning case #19-Z-75 was conditionally approved and adopted under Ordinance #966. The purpose of this case was to 1) create an east/west corridor for the airpark for the proposed 200 acre industrial airpark on the east side of the runway; and 2) rezone the 200’ R1-35 buffer on the north side of Thunderbird Road to I-1, removing the 14 residences that were planned to be built on the north side of Thunderbird Road.

The development plan was approved and the plats for the project (Scottsdale Industrial Airpark #4 and #5) were recorded with Thunderbird Road connected at Scottsdale Road to Redfield Road as the east/west corridor for the development.

The rezoning from the R1-35 buffer to I-1 was also conditionally approved with the provision that if any of the conditions were not satisfied, the zoning would automatically revert without legislative process to the original zoning. This rezoning was generally supported by the neighborhood with the following conditions, which were incorporated into the ordinance:

- Vehicular access from the Industrial Park shall be prohibited onto Thunderbird Road.
- Building setbacks on Thunderbird Road to be 100’.
- A minimum of 60’ of the 100’ setback shall be used solely as a landscape buffer.
- All buildings to be limited to a height of 20’.

Ordinance #1048 was adopted on July 5, 1977 which provided that the initial 60’ landscape buffer would be increased to include the Thunderbird right of way so the buffer between the neighborhood and the Industrial Park would be 100’.

Ordinance #1233 was adopted on September 25, 1979 as a result of alignment changes in Thunderbird Road but restated all of the above conditions for the rezoning, including the prohibition of access onto Thunderbird Road.

Airport Area: East/West Corridor Feasibility Study – October 16, 1991

Recommendations from that study included the following:

- Expand Redfield to utilize complete right of way.
- Relocate Thunderbird offramp to Raintree. (Note: The General Plan had freeway ramps exiting “Thunderbird Road” directly onto Northside Boulevard; at no time was the ramp at Thunderbird being considered to tie into Thunderbird Road.)
- Reconstruct intersection of Thunderbird/Redfield Road at Scottsdale Road to enhance traffic flow.
- Concluded the proposed tunnel under the airport runway was not feasible (although there are funds set aside for this project from the Regional Transportation Plan).

General Plan

Community Mobility Element

In the Community Mobility Element of the General Plan, the following Goals and Approaches are noted.

Goal - Protect neighborhoods from negative impacts of regional and citywide networks.

- Provide neighborhood systems that safely move people and connect neighborhoods to citywide and regional networks, while discouraging citywide and regional cut-through automobile traffic.
- Protect the livability of local neighborhoods from citywide and regional network influences by developing measures to reduce noise levels, and discourage high volume traffic and speeds within local neighborhoods.
- Explore neighborhood street layouts and designs that are not necessarily aligned with the citywide and regional network to prevent cut-through automobile traffic, reduce speeding and noise, provide greater and safer opportunities for non-motorized modes, and to create an environment where the neighborhood can flourish.
- Balance access and movement between citywide corridors and neighborhood corridors to favor protecting the neighborhoods.

Goal – Encourage a diversity of links between neighborhood systems with citywide and regional systems.

- Emphasize accessibility and connections between neighborhoods while discouraging citywide and regional traffic in neighborhoods.

Goal – Provide opportunities for building “community” through neighborhood mobility.

- Encourage the sensitive integration of live, work and play land uses and their physical links within and between neighborhoods to emphasize a sense of place.
- Strive for the highest standards of safety and security for all motorized and non-motorized modes.
- Promote neighborhood street systems as the foundation for bicycle use, through safety and design features.

Streets Master Plan – 2003

The General Plan Goals and Approaches were restated again:

Goal E: Protect neighborhoods from negative impacts of traffic.

- Focus traffic on citywide and regional streets
- Reduce noise associated with traffic in neighborhoods
- Discourage cut-through traffic

Seventh Day Adventist Academy

The Academy is adamantly opposed to the extension of Thunderbird Road. The City of Scottsdale does not have any right of way for Thunderbird Road through the Academy, and any property necessary for that roadway could only be acquired through the condemnation process. In addition, the proposed roadway would be within 20 to 30 feet of student residences, which would create an unacceptable situation. Finally, this would have no effect on the City's obligation to provide taxi access to the runway.

Current Status

Draft Scottsdale Airpark Circulation Study

The proposals to expand Redfield to 4 lanes (with no additional right of way) along with options to increase traffic through Raintree Drive use existing commercial corridors in a cost effective manner.

On page 10 of the study, the following statement appears: “A decrease in traffic over the eight year period was realized on Redfield Road, from Hayden to 76th Street and on Hayden Road from Raintree Drive south” without any further explanation. We believe this confirms that this area of the Airpark has reached a built out condition and the expected 50,000 jobs to be created will be north of the CAP canal and even north of the Loop 101.

Responses to questions raised at joint Transportation Commission/Airport Advisory Commission on April 18, 2007

Vice Chairman McCall – Raised the Loop 202 Freeway through Red Mountain and Las Sendas, as a favorable outcome for a major arterial through a residential area. Indicated residents there had known about the freeway for many years and that with barriers such as sound walls, the surrounding neighborhoods were satisfied.

Response – There has never been any suggestion that Thunderbird would be converted from a residential street to a major arterial. The primary concern is the amount of traffic that will be generated in the neighborhoods (unlike the freeway which has no access into the neighborhoods), not the amount of noise that might be generated.

Commissioner Weiss

- Inquired if there was any evidence that a 4 lane road would decrease house values.
Response – It is generally accepted that the same residence on a 4 lane major street will be less (usually significantly) than the same residence on a neighborhood street. In this case, perhaps even more unsettling is how many neighborhood streets will be converted into collector streets from the unavoidable cut-through traffic.
- Indicated he would like to see more pedestrian access to the Airpark.
Response – We agree! Extending Thunderbird Road would only inhibit pedestrian access to the Airpark.
- Inquired how the Airpark Plan was going to support the 50,000 new office jobs projected in the Airpark.

Response – The area surrounding the Thunderbird/Redfield Corridor is substantially built out. The primary growth area will be in the northern portion of the Airpark and regional streets in that area.

- Raised concerns with recent proposal by someone to develop portions of Adventist Academy south of Thunderbird/Redfield that has taxi access to runway.

Response – The condition of the taxi access to the runway is extant and will not have any impact on the various Thunderbird/Redfield proposals.

Commissioner Michaels – Inquired about the status of re-development of the Airpark area. Chairman Guilfoil indicated that the re-development is primarily expected to take place on Scottsdale Road. There was further inquiry about the “low height” buildings along Redfield and Gray Road and whether that area would be re-developed.

Response – These buildings are restricted by Ordinances 966 and 1233 which restrict the buildings nearest to Thunderbird Road to a height of 20’ within 200’ of the neighborhood. These are small lots that lend themselves to small warehouse type uses, and in order to re-develop this area, the property would have to go through a rezoning process to modify the height restriction and multiple lots would need to be assembled to create anything beyond what currently exists (several of these lots have also further subdivided and condominiumized).

Commissioner Gilliland – Asked for background on 101 and Thunderbird.

Response – Background information is included in the Planning and Zoning History section.

