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State land panel OKs new West Maui airport

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Hawaiian Airlines' plan for a new airstrip in West Maui was cleared for takeoff by the state Land Use Commission yesterday.

The commission, meeting in Honolulu, granted a request to reclassify a 50-acre site at Mahinahina despite objections from Hawaiian's interisland competitor, Mid-Pacific Airlines.

Mid-Pacific attorney Jerrold Guben said his client will either challenge the commission's action in court, or ask the state Transportation Department to regulate use of the airstrip. Guben said as it's now set up, Hawaiian will have an unfair advantage.

Hawaiian proposes to build the new airstrip on land leased from Maui Land and Pineapple Co., half a mile east of Honoapiilani Highway and two miles from the Kaanapali airstrip, which is scheduled to be closed.

The airstrip, including a terminal and helicopter landing pad, is expected to cost \$6 million at no cost to the taxpayers. Assurances by Hawaiian Air's attorney, William McCorriston, that the airstrip would be open



to all commercial carriers have not eased suspicions by Mid-Pacific.

Mid-Pacific injected a new issue into the discussion yesterday by offering to help pay for the airstrip. Guben said Mid-Pacific wants a role in deciding policies that will guide use so Hawaiian Air will not have a "stranglehold."

All nine commissioners supported Hawaiian Air's request to reclassify the site from agricultural to urban use with the following conditions:

- The airstrip will be available for use by other carriers on a "fair and equitable basis."

- Hawaiian Air and the landowner, Maui Land and Pine, must provide land for sugar or pineapple use to replace acreage taken out of production.

- Annual public disclosure must be made of the airstrip's income and expenses.

Commissioner Frederick Whittemore said he believes the conditions will prevent abuse. "I think the competition by itself regulates much of this," Whittemore said. "The fact that this airstrip is being constructed by free enterprise rather than a governmental body is unique in itself."

Robert Haws, president of Royal Hawaiian Air Service, said he was pleased at the approval and the fact that the commission "addressed our concerns" over access by carriers other than Hawaiian.

Royal Hawaiian now has exclusive rights to operate out of the Kaanapali airstrip, and has the most to lose when Hawaiian builds its airport. But Haws said he expects Royal Hawaiian to remain competitive in West Maui, although "obviously we will not be carrying as much, or the same percentage of the traffic."

Not all West Maui residents were equally pleased, however. Several residents, including President Byron Walters of the West Maui Taxpayers Association, objected to Hawaiian's request because they said it would increase traffic congestion.

Realtor Mac Lowson said he was disappointed the commission did not set any traffic limits, adding "now the fight will be at the county level." The site is designated on the county's West Maui community development plan for an airport, but the land still must be rezoned by the Maui Planning Commission and County Council.

ILWU agent William Kennison, who spoke in favor of reclassification during a commission hearing, said he shares the concerns of the taxpayers association. He cited projections that the Mahinahina airstrip would increase traffic from 125,000 now to a peak of 750,000 passengers.

The Maui County administration had supported the request, noting that concerns over traffic can be addressed during reviews of change of zoning, subdivision and application for building permits.

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