Washington State
Department of Transportation

Lynn Peterson
Secretary of Transportation

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September 3, 2013

The Honorable Tracey Eide
Co-Chair, Joint Transportation Committee
235 John A. Cherberg Building
Olympia, WA 98504-0430

The Honorable Judy Clibborn
Co-Chair, Joint Transportation Committee
415 John L. O'Brien Building
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

The Honorable Curtis King
Co-Chair, Joint Transportation Committee
305 John A. Cherberg Building
Olympia, WA 98504-0414

The Honorable Ed Orcutt
Joint Transportation Committee
408 John L. O'Brien Building
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Dear Senators Eide and King, and Representatives Clibborn and Orcutt:

In January 2013, the Joint Transportation Committee prepared a report that provided 13 recommendations to the WSDOT Aviation Division regarding the state's Air Search and Rescue program.

As part of those recommendations, WSDOT was asked to report to the JTC by September 1, 2013, on steps taken to implement the recommendations contained within the report.

Please find attached WSDOT's report to the JTC regarding the implementation of the recommendations. After you review the report, please feel free to direct any questions to either Tristan Atkins, WSDOT director of aviation, at 360-709-8020 or atkinstk@wsdot.wa.gov, or John Himmel, WSDOT emergency and security operations manager, at 360-705-7973 or himmelj@wsdot.wa.gov.

Sincerely,

Lynn Peterson
Secretary of Transportation

cc: Tristan Atkins, WSDOT Director of Aviation
        Chris Christopher, WSDOT Director, Maintenance and Operations
        John Himmel, WSDOT Emergency and Security Operations Manager
        Katy Taylor, WSDOT Chief of Staff

Aviation Search and Rescue Study (ASAR):
Steps taken to implement the ASAR report recommendations

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Report to the
Joint Transportation Committee

August 29, 2013

**Washington State
Department of Transportation**

Joint Transportation Committee: Aviation Search and Rescue Study (ASAR)
WSDOT Report
Steps taken to implement the ASAR report recommendations

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to outline the steps that the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has taken to implement the 13 recommendations of the January 2013 Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) report regarding Aviation Search and Rescue.

The Study

On March 23, 2012, the Legislature directed the Joint Transportation Committee to evaluate the most appropriate organization for the aviation search and rescue (ASAR) program, currently operating from the Washington State Department of Transportation. As directed in ESHB 2190, Sec. 204(5), the study was to address the following issues:

1. Where the aviation search and rescue operations should be located to provide the maximum benefit for these searches;
2. How the duplication of services and training should be addressed;
3. Whether the current structure is the best use of state and federal funding; and
4. If aviation search and rescue is relocated, what should be the source of funding?

The ASAR report, accepted by the Joint Transportation Committee in January 2013, identified 13 recommendations in addressing the study issues. Those recommendations were broken into three broad categories:

- WSDOT administration of Air Search and Rescue
- Air Search and Rescue Training
- Enhancements to General Aviation Safety

Actions taken by WSDOT in response to the report recommendations:

WSDOT Administration of ASAR

Recommendation 1- The Washington ASAR program should remain in WSDOT.

WSDOT input: Concur.

Actions taken: Not /Applicable

Next steps: Not /Applicable

Recommendation 2- WSDOT should assess whether the ASAR program should remain in the WSDOT Office of Emergency Management, or be moved to the Aviation Division.

WSDOT input: WSDOT conducted an assessment in 2011 and determined that the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) was the best location for the ASAR program. WSDOT re-evaluated its decision following the release of the report in early 2013, and determined the program was located in the appropriate office.

Actions taken: Not/Applicable

Next steps: Not/Applicable

Recommendation 3- WSDOT should cross-train existing WSDOT staff to lead air searches, in order to provide back-up to the aviation emergency coordinator. (Some cross-training is occurring, and it should continue.)

WSDOT input: Concur

Actions taken: OEM has and continues to conduct a cross-training program for staff.

Next steps:
1) *Continue to cross-train personnel and develop resource documentation.*
2) *Conduct training and certification.*
3) *Consistent with WSDOT's input regarding staffing concerns noted in the **JTC study***, *WSDOT plans to submit a budget decision package that includes an additional FTE for the Aviation Emergency Services program.*

JTC study (page 12): Concerns were raised about having a single individual in WSDOT to coordinate all ASAR events. If that person should go on a vacation or is for whatever reason unavailable when an aircraft goes missing, there could be a leadership void. WSDOT acknowledged the problem, and said they're working on cross-training **but could use another full-time FTE to provide back-up.*
http://www.leg.wa.gov/JTC/Documents/Final%20Studies/ASARFinalReport.pdf

Recommendation 4- WSDOT should take steps to make the ASAR program more transparent to its cooperating agencies and volunteers. This includes transparency in policies and process, agreements with stakeholder groups, methods for making search assignments, and criteria for assignment to ASAR volunteer rosters.

WSDOT input: Concur.

Actions taken: This has been an ongoing effort by the WSDOT OEM and has included the following completed actions:
1) *The Memorandum of Understanding with Civil Air Patrol is ready to renew and will be completed by September 30, 2013.*
2) *The Memorandum of Understanding with Washington Air Search and Rescue is in the final stages of being ready to sign and will be completed by September 30, 2013.*
3) *WSDOT has a current Memorandum of Understanding with the Emergency Management Division and the US Air Force.*
4) *Aviation Emergency Services (AES) Web pages are being reviewed to better provide updated and useful information to stakeholders and partners. This process will be completed by September 30, 2013.*
5) *WSDOT follows search assignment criteria listed in WAC 468-200, which provides the appropriate transparency of the search assignment criteria.*

Next steps:
1) *Continue website improvements to provide useful, updated information for our stakeholders and partners.*

Recommendation 5- WSDOT should work more closely with CAP, WASAR and other aviation stakeholders to improve relationships with those organizations, including holding regular meetings to maintain good working relationships and improve the flow of information.

WSDOT input: Concur.

Actions taken: This has been an ongoing effort by the WSDOT OEM and includes the following completed actions:
1) Created a Flight Line Support Team in collaboration with CAP. This includes furnishing a CAP-owned trailer with WSDOT-supplied equipment to support fixed-wing-aircraft operations at emergency and training operations. This team greatly improves overall safety of the operation as well as highly increases the readiness of aircraft to return-to-flight assignments.
2) Coordinated with other aviation organizations and agencies to create and strengthen partnerships. WSDOT meets with the NW Regional Aviation Group at their bi-monthly meetings and special training activities.

Next steps:
1) Continue to collaborate with volunteer groups to enhance and maintain response capabilities.
2) Develop a budget decision package that includes an additional FTE that will conduct more frequent meetings and training with our ASAR volunteer organizations.

Recommendation 6- WSDOT should report to the Joint Transportation Committee by September 1, 2013, on steps taken to implement recommendations contained in this report.

WSDOT input: Concur.

Actions taken: Report completed.

Next steps: Manage the timely completion of the "next steps" identified in this report and ensure follow up to sustain "actions taken".

ASAR Training

Recommendation 7- WSDOT and CAP, in cooperation with WASAR and others, should coordinate ASAR training courses to maximize the effectiveness of limited resources.

- To the extent possible, courses offered by WSDOT and CAP should be uniform to provide transferability at course completion.
- Course materials should, to the extent practical, be developed jointly and shared among organizations conducting training.
- WSDOT should explore opportunities to utilize qualified instructors, including CAP and WASAR instructors for training using WSDOT approved media in order to reduce workload on paid staff.

WSDOT input: Concur.

Actions taken: This has been an ongoing effort by the WSDOT OEM and includes the following completed actions:

1) *Conducted training over the past 12 months: 14 courses over 25 days, totaling 4,800 personnel hours. Training continues to be an ongoing and collaborative effort using CAP and WASAR instructors training volunteer personnel.*
   a. *The courses are directed by WAC using current best practices, ensuring that quality and safe training is conducted.*
   b. *The amount of training conducted is limited by availability of qualified volunteer staff, number of weekends open, and aircraft available.*
   c. *Course material is not released for public dissemination to ensure the integrity of content and security for testing. It is also being constantly updated to add new information and improve delivery methods.*
2) *Conducted Volunteer Instructors meetings regularly during the training cycle to review upcoming events and to discuss training-related issues. In the past 12 months, 8 meetings have been conducted.*

Next steps*:*
1) *Continue to provide training to ensure there is no degradation of current levels of service with volunteer groups and to maintain response capabilities.*
2) *Develop a budget decision package that includes an additional FTE to assist OEM with the development, coordination, and delivery of training with our ASAR volunteer organizations.*

Recommendation 8- WSDOT should work to expand ASAR training course offerings in Central and Eastern Washington, to make it easier for Central and Eastern Washington pilots to participate in ASAR.

WSDOT input*: Concur; however, effective implementation of this recommendation may require additional staffing.*

Actions taken*: This has been an ongoing effort by the WSDOT OEM and has included the following completed actions:*
1) *Courses have been conducted in Central and Eastern Washington to reach volunteers in those areas. The following courses have been conducted or are scheduled to occur in Spokane:*
   a. *New volunteer-orientation class held on December 15, 2012 (13 students)*
   b. *Mission Scanner ground school session held on March 23-24, 2013 (10 students)*
   c. *Aircrew Survival classroom session is scheduled for September 21-22, 2013.*

2) *In May at the Washington State Search and Rescue Conference held in Ellensburg, a class was presented on Air Operations for SAR and Air Resources II (29 students).*
.

Next steps*:*
1) *Continue to leverage existing resources and seek opportunities to conduct training across the state, or to bring students from Eastern Washington to courses being conducted in Western Washington.*
2) *Develop a budget decision package that includes an additional FTE and an increase in the training budget that will allow an increase in the amount of training for Eastern Washington. The funds would provide additional staff to assist with the development, coordination, and delivery of training with our aerial SAR volunteer organizations. The funds will also provide assets for the mobilization of personnel, volunteer trainers, and aircraft.*

Recommendation 9- WSDOT should more clearly designate training required to participate in ASAR missions.

WSDOT input: Concur

Actions taken: The OEM has completed the following actions:
1) All new volunteers are required to attend an orientation course which includes information on the RCW/WAC requirements to participate in the program. Additionally, examples of past missions are presented to enable the new volunteer to assess the time requirements, work conditions, and operations flow of aviation emergency services missions. This requirement has been in place since 1996. **WAC 468-200-120**

Next steps:
1) In conjunction with recommendation 4, review Aviation Emergency Services (AES) website to ensure adequate information is available to explain the process.

Enhancements to General Aviation Safety

Recommendation 10- Organizations involved in general aviation should strongly encourage pilots to file flight plans or leave itineraries for every flight.

WSDOT input: Concur

Actions taken: The WSDOT Aviation division has led this educational effort with the following actions:
1) Incorporated this message into presentations and discussions with pilot groups such as the Washington Pilots Association.
2) Posted an article on the WSDOT Blog, "Preflight checks: Can we find you?" that included information on filing a flight plan.
   http://wsdotblog.blogspot.com/2012/08/pre-flight-check-can-we-find-you.html
3) Media release on the Aviation email notification system (ListServe)—Pilots: check for temporary flight restrictions due to Washington wildfires
   http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/News/2012/09/WildfireTFRs.htm
4) Developed a webpage on the WSDOT Aviation website called, "Pilots Page" that includes educational sections on filing flight plans.

Next steps:
1) Complete an annual media release on the Aviation ListServe that encourages pilots to file flight plans.
2) Work with the WPA and other pilot organizations to leverage the annual media release into a minimum of two stakeholder newsletter articles.
3) Develop a flyer insert to distribute with WSDOT's annual notification of aircraft registration.
4) Improve the WSDOT "Pilot Safety Talk" webpage.

Recommendation 11- Organizations involved in general aviation should conduct on-going pilot safety education about the importance of using emergency beacons and following other flight safety policies.

WSDOT input: Concur

Actions taken: The WSDOT Aviation division has led this educational effort with the following actions:

1) *Incorporated this message into presentations and discussions with pilot groups such as the WPA.*
2) *Posted an article on the WSDOT Blog, "Preflight checks: Can we find you?" that included information on the importance of an operational ELT.*
   http://wsdotblog.blogspot.com/2012/08/pre-flight-check-can-we-find-you.html
3) *Developed a webpage on the WSDOT Aviation website called, "Pilots Page" that includes educational sections on the importance of maintaining and utilizing ELT/emergency beacons.*

Next steps:

1) *Complete an annual media release on the Aviation ListServe that encourages pilots to maintain and check their ELTs.*
2) *Work with the WPA and other pilot organizations to leverage the annual media release into a minimum of two stakeholder newsletter articles.*
3) *Develop a flyer insert to distribute with WSDOT's annual notification of aircraft registration.*
4) *Improve the WSDOT "Pilot Safety Talk" webpage*

Recommendation 12- The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, in conjunction with WSDOT and others, should encourage aircraft owners to equip their aircraft with 406 emergency beacons.

WSDOT input: Concur

Actions taken: The WSDOT Aviation division has led this educational effort with the following actions:

1) *Incorporated this message into presentations and discussions with pilot groups such as the WPA.*
2) *Posted an article on the WSDOT Blog, "Preflight checks: Can we find you?" that included information on 406 MHz ELTs.*
   http://wsdotblog.blogspot.com/2012/08/pre-flight-check-can-we-find-you.html
3) *Developed a webpage on the WSDOT Aviation website called, "Pilots Page" that includes educational sections on the benefits utilizing a 406 MHz ELT.*

Next steps:

1) *Complete an annual media release on the Aviation ListServe that encourages pilots to equip their aircraft with a 406 MHz ELTs.*
2) *Work with the WPA and other pilot organizations to leverage the annual media release into a minimum of two stakeholder newsletter articles.*
3) *Develop a flyer insert to distribute with WSDOT's annual notification of aircraft registration.*
4) *Improve the WSDOT "Pilot Safety Talk" webpage*

Recommendation 13- Aircraft registration renewals, aviation newsletters and magazines, and community colleges aviation courses should all be employed to enhance general aviation safety awareness.

WSDOT input: Concur

Actions taken: See actions reported in Recommendations #10-12 above.

Next steps*: See planned steps reported in Recommendations #10-12 above.*

Conclusion

WSDOT found the JTC Aviation Search and Rescue study extremely useful in developing our strategy to improve this important program.

WSDOT is committed to implementing the next steps identified in this report. The implementation will be jointly managed by the Maintenance Operations Division/Office of Emergency Management and the Aviation Division.

Questions regarding this report should be addressed to:

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