

Burke's role in economic development and aviation is critical for Cleveland's future

By [Plain Dealer guest columnist](#)
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Burke Lakefront Airport, photo by Mike Holthouse

Burke Lakefront Airport has opportunity to soar

By Anthony J. Coyne

Clevelanders should not consider grounding Burke Lakefront Airport before it is given an opportunity to take off. Recent articles and editorials have argued that the city of Cleveland and those charged with planning its future development have ignored the role and potential of Burke, possible alternative uses of its 450 acres and the transportation network surrounding it. Not so.

Consider these facts:

After a decade of study, the Cleveland Planning Commission has adopted plans for Burke. The internationally recognized consulting firm of Landrum and Brown advises the city on general aviation operations. Presentations have been made by the Cleveland Department of Port Control and various local and national planning firms during public meetings about the future of the airport. When I joined the planning commission nearly two decades ago, closing the airport was something I thought made sense. After extensive study, I have learned that the wiser decision is to reinvest in it to support our regional aviation system.

The planning commission's preliminary adoption of the Lakefront Plan has identified redevelopment opportunities along the southern border of the airport.

The plan accommodates development on the southeast edges of the airport and includes corporate office and retail expansion to the east. The existing concourse is fully leased. The plan incorporates the conclusions of economic development officials that there is legitimate market interest in developing mixed use and office development near the airport.

Cleveland Hopkins International Airport is situated in the New York-Chicago air corridor, which is one of busiest corridors in the entire world.

Increases in flight operations at Hopkins would stack up planes and negatively impact cross-country air service and result in the loss of major commercial carriers in Cleveland. Ironically, Pittsburgh and Columbus, which are envious of our hub, would benefit.

Flight operations at Burke over the past two decades have consistently ranged between 70,000 and 100,000 per year.

Studies undertaken in the past three years point to Burke's function as an effective reliever to Hopkins. In short, Burke enables Hopkins to maintain efficient and safe flight schedules.

The Federal Aviation Administration imposes significant restrictions on the location of reliever airports.

Suggested alternatives are simply not realistic. The future of Lost Nation Airport in Lake County is in doubt. Neither Lorain nor Cuyahoga county airports can handle large commercial aircraft such as 707s, 747s, Airbuses and so forth. Deferred maintenance issues at the Cuyahoga airport are substantial. The technology at that airport is inadequate to serve significant increases in the new larger jets. The timetable and politics for implementing the many and costly upgrades (such as lengthening runways) are big obstacles. Burke currently handles any kind of aircraft flown in the world.

Burke is well-suited to handle the new generation of very light jets (VLJ) and the new business model of fractional (shared) aircraft ownership.

The FAA predicts that more than 10,000 new VLJ will be flying in the next decade; Hopkins cannot accommodate such influx without compromising safety and efficiency.

Burke rests on landfill.

Its foundation is dredging from the Cuyahoga River, as well as a combination of sanitary landfill and construction debris landfill that will not support high-rise condominiums or significant residential development without substantial rehabilitation of soils, environment and infrastructure. Today's development is further burdened by the accumulation of unfunded regulatory mandates.

Relocation of the Port of Cleveland to Burke has never been an option.

Although the eastern end of Burke was studied by the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Port Authority and the city's port control department, FAA requirements prohibit the move.

The reality is this: Cleveland needs to protect its vital aviation operations and simultaneously advance economic development opportunities. The West Shoreway of Cleveland will be significantly reclaimed with recreational and development opportunities in the next five to 10 years. These are very real projects that are moving us toward a rejuvenated shoreline. Such work merits our support -- and our recognition of its value.

That implementation strategy has to continue along Cleveland's downtown Shoreway, adjacent and complementary to the Burke Lakefront Airport.