

**THE FUTURE OF THE SAN DIEGO REGION'S AIRPORT
CHOICEWORK DIALOGUES WITH COUNTY RESIDENTS**

FINAL REPORT



Prepared for:
San Diego County Regional Airport Authority

Prepared by:
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In Association with:
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Strategic Communications

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Executive Summary

This report describes the results of a series of six eight-hour dialogues with San Diego County residents on possible approaches to the future of air travel and San Diego's airport. There are three parts to this summary, which cover methodology, general findings and implications for action for decision-makers committed to leading a public learning process in support of a long-term solution to the San Diego region's air travel needs.

Methodology

These intense, day-long dialogues were sponsored by the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority (SDCRAA) and conducted in March and April 2004. They were designed to assess residents' views about the current airport at Lindbergh Field as well as how their views evolved as they came to terms with the pros and cons of four possible ways of addressing the airport issue. Viewpoint Learning conducted six specialized "ChoiceWork Dialogues," each one comprised of 35 to 45 participants randomly selected to be representative of the general population. The dialogues were explicitly not site-specific – rather they focused on what kind of airport citizens would like to see and what their top priorities are for air travel and the future of the region.

The dialogues were designed with several purposes in mind:

- To provide an in-depth understanding of what San Diegans' values and priorities are regarding air travel, growth, transit, and the economy;
- To inform the design of an airport solution (including the site selection process) so that what goes before the voters in November 2006 will be aligned with those values and priorities;
- To reveal promising ways to bridge the disconnect between leaders' and the public's respective priorities as leaders work to find a solution that the public will support;
- To lay the groundwork for broader citizen engagement.

General Findings

The dialogues revealed that participants' positions on the airport question changed markedly as a result of extended discussion. As diverse groups of citizens holding a wide range of views talked through the various possibilities and tradeoffs, they discovered a great deal of common ground, and a consistent pattern of priorities and beliefs emerged.

Core values

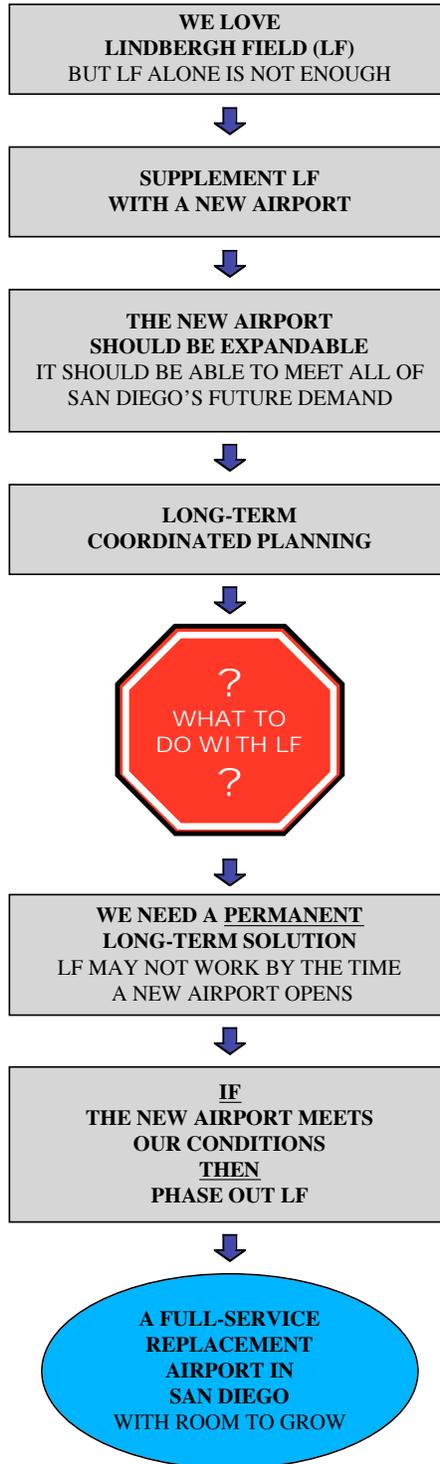
Participants' core values were consistent across all six dialogues. Across the board, participants wanted accountability, a voice in major decisions, permanent solutions (as opposed to ad-hoc or piecemeal approaches), and plans that can adapt to changing circumstances – all coupled with a powerful love of San Diego and a desire to enhance its quality of life. These core values shaped participants' responses to everything that was said or heard throughout the day.

The evolution of views

The specific evolution of participants' views is discussed in detail in the body of the report, but in general it followed a consistent pattern, outlined in the following chart:

Exhibit 1

Evolution of Views



Source: Viewpoint Learning, Inc
Prepared by: Viewpoint Learning, Inc., Ricondo & Associates, Inc.

Most participants entered the conversation with a strong attachment to Lindbergh Field, but they quickly came to realize that Lindbergh alone will not be able to meet the region's needs in the future. Building a supplemental airport was an obvious next step. Participants had several key requirements for this new airport – that it be able to accommodate all of San Diego's future demand, be easily accessible by car and public transportation, and offer a wide range of domestic and international flights. Participants agreed that long-term, coordinated planning will be needed to effectively integrate a new airport with commercial development and transit throughout the region. As they came to see the new airport in more concrete terms, participants began wrestling seriously with the question of whether Lindbergh Field should remain operational. Ultimately, most participants decided that it should be phased out, in large part because of the long lead time before a new airport could begin operating, a strong resistance to piecemeal solutions and a growing enthusiasm for other possible uses for the Lindbergh Field site. Five out of the six groups concluded that if the new airport met their conditions, then Lindbergh Field could be closed and the new airport would become the San Diego region's primary facility.

Implications for Action

Clearly San Diego County residents need to go through a *public learning process* in order to resolve the question of what to do about the airport. But that process, if left completely to chance, could take years, or might never happen at all. However, if leaders take into account certain key messages, likely roadblocks, acceptable tradeoffs and conditions revealed in these dialogues, they will be better equipped to lead the public through the thought process described above. Doing so will create an openness to bolder and more effective long-term solutions. The dialogue results point to three important strategies

1. Targeting key messages

Participants expressed three overarching requirements for decision-makers to take into account as they begin to narrow down a proposal for the San Diego region's future airport.

- “Do it now.” Participants were unanimous in their call for leaders to take action now, especially as land becomes scarcer and more expensive.
- “Do it right.” Participants were fed up with short-term, piecemeal, ad-hoc solutions. They were adamant that whatever solution is reached must solve the airport problem once and for all and were willing to make some significant steps up front in order to plan now for a facility that can expand to meet future demand.
- “Thoughtful long-term planning.” Participants were hungry for effective long-term planning and highly critical of San Diego's track record on this front. They wanted to see careful attention to how a new airport would affect growth, development and regional transit for decades to come, and they strongly supported phased or evolutionary approaches that would adapt to changing circumstances.

2. The need to sequence the discussion

Participants followed a predictable path as they moved from their initial strong attachment to Lindbergh to their conclusion that the region needs a new replacement airport. As leaders take this conversation to the next level, it is vitally important that San Diegans be allowed to do the difficult work of reconciling priorities themselves, without being rushed to a pre-determined solution. Attempts to leap immediately to the end point, circumventing the evolution of people's views, are likely to create resistance, not dispel it.

Key themes to initiate discussion

There are several themes that San Diegans are ready to hear, and that leaders can begin using now in all communications and public relations material:

- San Diego needs a new airport. Lindbergh cannot keep up with demand for long.
- Something must be done. Airports take a long time to build. San Diegans are willing to take steps now to acquire the land and to begin hammering out a plan.
- Long-term solutions. Citizens want to resolve the airport issue once and for all.

Once people accept these principles, they will be open to discussing a wide range of solutions – a necessary (but by no means sufficient) step towards a successful vote.

The dialogues also revealed a number of public concerns that, if incorporated into proposals and campaigns, have the potential to move residents to consider bolder proposals for the airport.

- Evolutionary approaches. Citizens are more comfortable with plans that can be implemented in phases, feeling that this ensures greater accountability and flexibility.
- Decision-makers on the same page. Citizens are frustrated and turned off by obstructionism, turf battles and in-fighting among agencies and leaders. They will be more receptive to decision-makers who work together and speak with a united voice.
- A regional perspective/a regional conversation. The airport is an issue that affects all San Diegans in the county, whether or not they fly or live near a potential airport site, and the frame of reference must be regional. Public conversations that bring together more diverse groups run less risk of falling into NIMBY traps.

Themes to raise only when the public is ready

There are a few themes – in particular the question of whether to close Lindbergh and a discussion of specific sites – that cannot be stressed at the beginning of the conversation. While leaders may be tempted to rush headlong into these issues, they risk arousing fierce resistance. These themes should only be addressed at a later stage in the sequence of communication. They cannot serve as starting points, because citizens will resist and reject them if they have not resolved other concerns first.

Scaling it up: the value of traditional and non-traditional methods.

Where traditional methods will work: When it comes to the themes that San Diegans are ready for today, traditional forms of communication can be used quite effectively. Participants in the dialogues demonstrated a willingness to accept expert forecasts of the future inadequacy of Lindbergh Field. They also quickly understood all of the physical, financial and political challenges and time constraints involved in building an airport. Newspaper articles, television and other media coverage, speeches, websites and other standard forms of communications should be sufficient to communicate these messages.

Where interactive methods are necessary: Understanding the need for action, however, is not the same as embracing a solution, and public acceptance of these themes does not guarantee a successful vote. To move the public past simply acknowledging the urgency of the situation, leaders must use more interactive processes, allowing residents to connect with leaders and with one another in order to identify common solutions that serve the community. Ordinary citizens should be part of the planning process from the earliest stages. Citizens want their voices and their concerns to be heard, and they deeply appreciate having their opinions solicited. Only by engaging with other citizens and other points of view will the public work through its attachment to Lindbergh Field and be willing to

move on. Traditional methods of top-down information will not be sufficient to move citizens to consider any solution that does not leave Lindbergh in operation.

Furthermore, without broad engagement and more interactive communication, residents are likely to resort to NIMBYism when the site conversation arises. If the region as a whole does not come to the strong conclusion that San Diego must have a new airport, then the opposition of residents of affected neighborhoods could readily overpower the demand of the greater community for an acceptable solution.

3. Creating a comfort zone for the conversation

Without significant, visible and unified political muscle behind a solution, it will be difficult for a bold proposal to succeed. Yet to date, many of the region's elected officials and public leaders have steered clear of a realistic and open conversation about the subject, except to resist any proposal that a new airport might end up in their districts. Part of the problem is that the issue is a "third rail" of San Diego politics. Leaders (especially those facing term limits) have very little incentive to focus on the real tradeoffs involved in possible solutions; they face potentially negative consequences if they do so. The information learned in these dialogues, however, can help prepare leaders to broach the subject with their constituents and provide much-needed leadership on what may be one of the most important public policy decisions facing the San Diego region this century.

From these results, leaders can gain valuable insight into how to frame the airport question in ways that matter to the public. They can anticipate probable questions, major objections and likely responses so that they are better able to lead the conversation. Some key points for leaders to keep in mind that will also help avoid the third-rail effect:

Information must mesh with values

Leaders must not assume that if members of the public simply receive the proper information they will promptly make up their minds in ways that are consistent with expert opinion. These dialogues demonstrate that citizens make up their minds not on the basis of information alone, but on the basis of values, emotions, deeply held beliefs and the reactions of their fellow citizens – and they will dismiss information that does not square with their values.

The pitfalls of mistrust

Maintaining the public's trust through dialogue, respect, appropriate framing, proper sequencing and honest two-way communication is essential. When citizens lose trust in their leaders and the decision-making process (as they clearly did in one dialogue) they are much less open to change and much more prone to feel that they are being manipulated. They are more likely to be skeptical of facts that do not agree with their viewpoint and to reject promising solutions in favor of the devil they know. Citizens are generally practical and open to considering a wide range of solutions. Once they feel their trust has been abused, however, the reserves of public confidence necessary to approve or implement major policy changes cannot be rebuilt quickly or easily.

As the SDCRAA works to design a ballot initiative for 2006, the mistrust issue may well play a pivotal role in its success or failure. For any proposal to succeed, ***it is vital that the public's input be respected and seriously considered, and that the public feel that this is the case.***

Summary

The conclusions that dialogue participants reached at the end of a long, hard day's conversation do not indicate ***where most people in San Diego stand today***, but ***where they are prepared to go*** once they are given the opportunity to work through the issue, with effective leadership to guide the

process. They also reveal a set of powerful messages, communications strategies and core underlying values that can help the SDCRAA and other decision-makers lead an all-important public learning process key to addressing the San Diego region's long-term air transportation needs.

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Table Of Contents

[I. Introduction](#) 2

[II. ChoiceWork Dialogues on the Future of San Diego’s Airport](#) 5

[III. General Findings](#) 6

[Part One: Five Mainstream Dialogues](#) 7

[A. Deep-seated attachment to Lindbergh Field](#) 7

[B. Strong initial support for a supplemental solution](#) 9

[C. Second thoughts about a supplemental solution](#) 10

[D. Strong and increasing support for Scenario 3 \(replacement airport\)](#) 11

[E. Aeroplex: A proxy for planning](#) 12

[F. Paying for it](#) 14

[Part Two: Session 4 – A Cautionary Tale](#) 15

[A. Strong initial similarities to other groups](#) 15

[B. An outburst of mistrust](#) 16

[C. Lessons for leaders](#) 17

[IV. Other Findings](#) 18

[A. Potential benefits and drawbacks of airport development](#) 18

[B. Do it right, do it NOW](#) 20

[C. Participants’ vision](#) 21

[Evolution of Participants’ Views](#) 22

[D. Social capital](#) 23

[V. Interpreting and Building on the Results](#) 24

[A. The role of information](#) 24

[B. The pitfalls of mistrust](#) 25

[C. Key themes](#) 26

[D. Opportunities for scaling up the conversation](#) 28

[Conclusion](#) 28

[Appendix A](#) 30

[Quantitative Findings](#) 30

[Potential Benefits of Airport Development](#) 36

[Potential Drawbacks of Airport Development](#) 37

[Appendix B](#) 38

[Participant Demographics](#) 38

I. Introduction

San Diego International Airport, popularly known as Lindbergh Field, has served the region well for over 75 years, and it continues to function well today. However, the region's growing population and the increasing demand for air travel are placing such great burdens on the current airport that it soon will not be able to keep up. San Diego has struggled for years with the question of what to do about this problem: expansion at Lindbergh itself is extremely difficult due to nearby development and geographical constraints, while the prospect of relocating the airport to some other site has raised public and political opposition. However, the long lead time required for any long-term solution to become operational means that decisions – to stick with what we have, to supplement it, or to replace it – have to be made soon.

In March and April 2004, Viewpoint Learning conducted a series of six specialized ChoiceWork Dialogues with diverse groups of citizens from throughout the county to discuss the airport issue and possible ways of addressing the future of air travel in San Diego. This project was funded by the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority (SDCRAA) as part of that agency's mandate to shape a proposal for a long-term airport solution, which will go before the voters in November 2006. In these intense eight-hour sessions participants were asked to consider alternative ways of addressing the airport issue and to come to terms with some of the difficult decisions and tradeoffs involved. These dialogues were explicitly not site-specific – rather they focused on what *kind* of airport citizens would like to see and what their top priorities are for air travel and the future of the region.

Creating a proposal that the public will accept will require on-going citizen engagement from the earliest stages, both to shape the proposal and to build broad-based support. These dialogues were a vital first step in this process, as they shed light on the kinds of solutions the public will accept and under what conditions (for a more complete description of the methodology, see the box on page 4). The dialogues were planned with several key purposes in mind:

- To provide an in-depth understanding of what San Diegans' values and priorities are regarding air travel, growth, transit, and the economy;
- To inform the design of an airport solution so that what goes before the voters will be aligned with those values and priorities;
- To reveal promising opportunities and likely challenges for leaders as they work to find solutions that the public will trust and support;
- To lay the groundwork for broader citizen engagement on this issue.

As participants worked together to craft a vision for the future of air transportation in the region, all six groups raised similar concerns and five of the six arrived at strikingly consistent conclusions. This report summarizes the findings and conclusions drawn from all six dialogues – the shared themes and the common ground – and illuminates the way that San Diegans' views will likely evolve if they are given the opportunity to resolve some of these tradeoffs and the leadership to help them do so.

This project was designed to initiate a process of engaging San Diegans in the important decisions that must be made to resolve the airport question, and to provide insights that will be essential to decision-makers as they shape a proposal. Solutions that do not take into account

citizens' values and thoughtful judgment have little chance of being successful or sustainable. Many efforts, well-conceived from a technical standpoint, have foundered because they clashed with public values and failed to gain the broad-based support they needed to take root. The findings that follow suggest several areas of opportunity for moving forward that San Diegans will be prepared to support, and the conditions for that support.

ChoiceWork Dialogue: The Methodology

Viewpoint Learning's ChoiceWork Dialogue methodology differs from polls and focus groups in its **purpose, advance preparation, and depth of inquiry.**

- **Purpose.** ChoiceWork Dialogues are designed to do what polls and focus groups cannot do and were never developed to do. While polls and focus groups provide an accurate snapshot of people's current thinking, ChoiceWork Dialogues are designed to predict the future direction of people's views on important issues where they have not completely made up their minds, or where changed circumstances create new challenges that need to be recognized and addressed. Under these conditions, people's top-of-mind opinions are highly unstable, and polls and focus groups can be very misleading. ChoiceWork Dialogues enable people to develop their own fully worked-through views on an issue in dialogue with their peers, even if they previously have not given it much thought. By engaging representative cross-sections of the population in this way, ChoiceWork Dialogues provide unique insight into how people's views change as they learn. They can identify areas of potential public support where leaders can successfully implement policies consonant with people's core values.
- **Advance Preparation.** ChoiceWork Dialogues require highly trained facilitators and (above all) the preparation of special workbooks that brief people on the issues. These workbooks formulate a manageable number of research-based scenarios, which are presented as a series of values-based choices, and they lay out the pros and cons of each scenario in a manner that allows participants to work through how they really think and feel about each one. This tested workbook format enables people to absorb and apply complex information quickly.
- **Depth of Inquiry.** Polls and focus groups avoid changing people's minds, while ChoiceWork Dialogues are designed to explore how and why people's minds change as they learn. While little or no learning on the part of the participants occurs in the course of conducting a poll or focus group, ChoiceWork Dialogues are designed to lead to a huge amount of learning. ChoiceWork Dialogues are day-long, highly structured dialogues – 24 times as long as the average poll and four times as long as the average focus group. Typically, participants spend the morning familiarizing themselves with the scenarios and their pros and cons and developing in dialogue with each other their vision of what they would like to have happen in the future. They spend the afternoons testing their preferences against the hard and often painful tradeoffs they would need to make to realize their values. To encourage learning, the ChoiceWork methodology is based on dialogue rather than debate — this is how public opinion really forms, by people talking with friends, neighbors and co-workers. These eight-hour sessions allow intense social learning, and both quantitative and qualitative measures are used to determine how and why people's views change as they learn.

II. ChoiceWork Dialogues on the Future of San Diego's Airport

Viewpoint Learning conducted a series of six ChoiceWork Dialogues with 35 to 45 participants in each. Participants were randomly recruited from across the county, and represent a wide range of socio-economic circumstances, ethnic backgrounds, and political leanings. In all six sessions, citizens spent the morning crafting a vision for the future for air travel in the region and in the afternoon did the difficult work of determining priorities, appropriate steps and acceptable tradeoffs. A total of 224 people participated.

As a framework for their discussion, participants used a specially designed workbook, constructed around four distinct scenarios. The scenarios were developed in consultation with the SDCRAA, aviation experts and economists, and were designed to represent – from a citizen's perspective – the full range of options under consideration. These four scenarios served as a starting point only: participants were welcome to combine them or create new options.

Participants were asked to consider the following four scenarios:

- **Improve Lindbergh Field as Much as Possible:** In this scenario air travelers to San Diego will continue to fly in and out of Lindbergh Field and no new airport facility will be built elsewhere in the county. All reasonable improvements and expansions will be made to increase Lindbergh's capacity. Lindbergh Field will continue to offer primarily shorter-haul flights on smaller aircraft. These improvements will postpone the most serious overcrowding but it will not solve the longer-term problem.
- **Supplement Lindbergh Field with a Second Airport:** In this scenario travelers will continue to use Lindbergh Field for trips of less than 500 miles. People making longer trips (including international flights and all flights on larger airplanes) will use a second mid-sized airport that will be built either on a military base or elsewhere in the county. Lindbergh Field will be left largely as it is today. Between these two airports San Diego's projected air travel needs will be met for at least a generation.
- **Close Lindbergh Field and Replace It with a Single Airport:** In this scenario, all travelers will use a new airport that will be accessible from most areas of San Diego in 45 minutes or less. The new airport will be built either on a current military base (if one becomes available) or built from the ground up elsewhere in the county. Lindbergh Field will be closed down. The new airport will handle all of San Diego's air transportation and it will accommodate the region's growth for the foreseeable future.
- **Build an "Aeroplex":** In this scenario, San Diego will move beyond simply building a new airport to create a multi-faceted "Aeroplex" that will combine air travel, high-speed rail, highways and conventional rail in a planned regional network. Designed to enhance the flow of people, goods and services around the region, the Aeroplex will aim to attract "smart" high-tech industries and create a wide variety of new jobs. Aeroplex planning will include incentives for housing, business and cultural development, with the aim of improving the region for generations to come.

These scenarios were designed to answer the question "What kind of airport do we want?" not "Where should we put it?" Instead of debating the merits of locating an airport at specific sites (i.e., Miramar vs. Camp Pendleton vs. the Imperial desert), participants focused on what they want in air travel, how they see the future of the city and the region, their attitudes towards

growth, and their priorities for economic development. These values are crucial: the design of an airport must be grounded in San Diegans' vision of what they want for air travel and the future of the region, and that design will in turn help establish the parameters for site selection.

A clear and strikingly consistent pattern emerged in five of the six groups. Most participants entered the conversation with a strong attachment to Lindbergh Field, which influenced their initial choices. However, as the day evolved and people confronted drawbacks and alternatives to keeping Lindbergh Field as San Diego's primary airport, the dynamic of the day showed a marked shift toward – and even enthusiasm for – building something new.

At the same time, these dialogues provided a clear object lesson in the pitfalls that mistrust can pose to any project that requires significant public support. When mistrust runs high (as it did in one dialogue) citizens are less open to change and more likely to feel that they are being manipulated. Under such conditions, they will reject even a well-conceived proposal, preferring a known quantity. Understanding this mistrust factor will be vitally important for leaders as they shape a proposal and place it before the public.

III. General Findings

Five of the six sessions followed a consistent pattern in their responses to the four scenarios and the conclusions they reached. The other session had similar priorities and concerns to the other groups, but came to very different final conclusions.

In this section we discuss the two patterns separately. In Part One we outline the results from the five “mainstream” groups, noting (where appropriate) those findings that were consistent across all six groups. In Part Two, we outline the results of Session 4 (the “different drummer” group) and discuss how and why this group's final positions differ from the others. Both the five “mainstream” sessions and the single “different drummer” session were highly informative and produced valuable results. Indeed, there is as much to learn from the single divergent group as there is from the others – both patterns offer important lessons for leaders who hope to address this difficult issue.

Part One: Five Mainstream Dialogues

A. Deep-seated attachment to Lindbergh Field

Participants entered the dialogue with a deep attachment to and affection for Lindbergh Field. Their affection sprang not only from practical factors – foremost among them the airport’s convenient central location and small size – but also from more intangible qualities. Many participants spoke warmly of the beauty of the facility and the approach over downtown and the water. Others pointed to Lindbergh Field’s historical significance and its importance as an icon of San Diego.

PARTICIPANT COMMENTS¹

It's a Fisher-Price airport: easy, convenient and pretty. (4/4)

I love Lindbergh. It's beautiful ... with the water and Balboa Park and the boats. We're really lucky compared to other cities. (4/17)

At the same time, however, participants saw shortcomings with Lindbergh as it exists today. Many cited the airport’s inability to handle larger planes, the lack of international service and the lack of direct flights.

Several participants complained of having to travel to other airports like Ontario, John Wayne or LAX because flights out of San Diego were inconvenient, expensive or simply unavailable. Frustration with traffic and parking around the airport was widespread, as were complaints about crowding in the terminals and at the baggage claim.

Lindbergh is a wonderful little airfield. But it's a little airfield. We need more space. (4/4)

I remember when you could be dropped off 15 to 20 minutes before your flight. Now if we're going less than 500 or 600 miles, we just drive. (4/3)

As they considered their own experiences in light of data on Lindbergh’s size, its projected capacity and the amount of growth expected in the region over the next 15 years, participants quickly concluded that the current airport alone would not be enough to meet San Diego’s needs. In particular, they were concerned that San Diego’s economic growth would suffer if the region were unable to meet the demand for air transportation. Although some had mixed feelings about growth, most participants saw it as inevitable, something that the region must plan to accommodate. And while they were concerned about increased traffic and congestion, participants overwhelmingly wanted San Diego to continue to expand economically, to add jobs, and to compete effectively with other cities. Very quickly, participants came to feel that addressing Lindbergh’s deficiencies must be a key component of any plan for the future of the region.

I stopped traveling out of Lindbergh and go to Ontario instead because I can't get seats. The flights I need are already booked. (4/17)

Key conditions and values

Citizens identified a series of key conditions for what they want from San Diego’s ideal airport. These were remarkably consistent across all six groups:

- More non-stop flights

¹ Participant comments are drawn from all six sessions, with each made on the date indicated.

- More flights and more competition, leading to lower fares
- More international flights
- More jobs and economic growth, allowing the region to remain competitive
- Ease of use – efficient, user-friendly and secure
- Centrally located (less than an hour away for most San Diegans)
- Easily accessible by car and mass transit
- An attractive facility that serves as a symbol of, and gateway to San Diego
- Potential to accommodate future growth

These conditions went hand in hand with a set of key values that informed participants’ responses to all the scenarios. Across the board, participants valued:

- Accountability
- Having a voice in decisions that affect their lives
- Long-term solutions
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Economy and cost-effectiveness
- Convenience
- San Diego itself: participants showed a powerful love for their city and a desire to enhance its quality of life

Overall, participants’ powerful attachment to Lindbergh Field did not translate into support for Scenario 1. “Improve Lindbergh” began and ended the day as the lowest ranked choice on a 10 point scoring system. It moved down from 4.7 to 4.2, with a negative net shift of –16 points.²

² In each of the dialogues, participants were surveyed twice, once at the beginning of the day and again at the end. They were asked to rate their response to each choice independently on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being totally positive and 1 being totally negative. In addition, at the end of the day participants were allowed to include a conditional statement along with the rating: for example, one participant rated “Improve Lindbergh Field” as a 7, given the condition that “it is a temporary fix until a new facility is built.”

Quantitative results are expressed in terms of *means* and *shifts*.

- Means: The initial mean for each scenario indicates participants’ average rating of the choice in the morning; the final mean represents participants’ average rating of the same scenario at the end of the dialogue.
- Shifts: The “shifts” measure how widespread opinion change is within the group, as well as the direction of that change, by comparing individual participants’ ratings of each scenario at the beginning and the end of the day. For example, if 25% of participants rate a scenario higher at the end of the day than they did at the beginning, and 5% of participants rate it lower, the net shift would be +20 points.

The quantitative results for the four scenarios presented in Part One of this section represent an aggregate of five out of the six sessions; quantitative results from Session 4 are discussed in Part Two of this section.

B. Strong initial support for a supplemental solution

I like Lindbergh Field, but it's a buggy in an age of high tech. (4/17)

In all six dialogues, participants decided almost immediately that continuing to make do with Lindbergh alone would not satisfy their key conditions for what they want from San Diego's airport. Building a new airport was the obvious solution.

This quick consensus that San Diego needs a new airport led to the central – and most difficult – question of the day: What to do with Lindbergh Field? The conversation around this point was extremely animated and complex, and in most groups participants returned to the question several times throughout the day. Many of the same points were raised in all six dialogues, although different groups assigned varying levels of importance to each.³

Participants' attachment to Lindbergh led them initially to gravitate towards the second scenario,

I love our airport. I love it very much. I don't know why we can't build another airport, and keep this one. Another airport for longer flights and non-stops rather than driving to LA. Because I love the airport we have right now. (4/24)

“Supplement Lindbergh with a Second Airport.” This scenario began the day as the highest-ranked choice across the board (rated 6.3 out of 10) and participants' initial comments underscored their strong support. As participants envisioned this scenario, Lindbergh would continue to function in some capacity (either for short-haul flights, small planes, or cargo only) but most of the

burden of the region's air traffic would shift to a second airport to be built elsewhere.

This scenario's initial appeal lay primarily in keeping Lindbergh as a working airport. Many participants pointed to things Lindbergh does well, and to the fact that it is already a well-established functioning airport. It is built and paid for, and its impacts are an accepted fact of life for people in neighboring areas. Other participants liked the idea of splitting airport noise and traffic between two sites, seeing this as a way of possibly minimizing the impacts created by a single large airport.

It would be ludicrous to close that airport. It works fine. We expanded it and it works great. We should build a second airport and use Lindbergh Field for what it's good for – like flights of 500 miles or less. (4/18)

The second major attraction of the supplemental scenario was that participants saw it as offering the greatest flexibility for the future. A second airport could be built, participants felt, and adapted or expanded as needed to keep pace with San Diego's growth, while the decision of what to do with Lindbergh could be deferred until we have a clearer sense of what the future holds. This kind of wait-and-see incrementalism was especially appealing for participants who were uncomfortable with dramatic change or who viewed growth and financial projections with skepticism.

³ After the first dialogue some changes and clarifications were made in the background and arguments for and against Scenario 2, aimed at presenting a more detailed picture of the feasibility of a two-airport solution.

However, participants most emphatically did NOT turn to this choice because they believed that if Lindbergh remained in service the second airport would be smaller or less obtrusive in the long run. In fact, they frequently stipulated that the supplemental airport must be planned so that it could eventually become San Diego's sole commercial airport. Almost unanimously, participants felt it was critical to set aside enough land now to build a major airport (even if what is initially built is quite modest in scope) and to plan for an airport that will be able to keep up with San Diego's growth for 50 years or more. Participants were extremely receptive to the idea of an airport that is phased in and expanded over time to keep pace with growth.

C. Second thoughts about a supplemental solution

As participants examined the full implications of a two-airport solution, their support for this approach began to waver.

The most significant factor leading participants to move away from a two-airport scenario was the idea that it was a piecemeal solution. Over and over, in every dialogue, participants returned to the refrain, "We want to do it *right*." Once they realized that they were willing to set aside the land and make the plans that would accommodate a single major airport, many participants began to reconsider their attachment to Lindbergh.

Expanding or maintaining Lindbergh Field is like putting a band-aid on an open wound. It's throwing money away. (4/24)

Other factors that emerged as participants began to reconsider the two-airport scenario included:

- Reluctance to invest public money in infrastructure and improvements for two airports, especially if Lindbergh Field would eventually be closed anyway.
- Long lead time: many participants came to feel that by the time a new airport is up and running Lindbergh will be obsolete and ready to close.
- Difficulty making connections between short- and long-haul flights
- Safety: some participants were concerned about the difficult approach to Lindbergh Field; this was not a majority concern, but it came up consistently in each session.
- Appealing potential alternate uses for the Lindbergh Field site, especially those that could generate additional revenue for the region.
- Interestingly, experts' main argument against a supplemental airport (that San Diego's market will never be large enough to support two commercial airports and that the airlines will not support this solution) did not resonate widely with those who were not already open to the possibility of phasing out Lindbergh. Many dismissed the premise outright, contending that San Diego is important enough a destination that demand will materialize and the airlines will

Land is too valuable to use Lindbergh as an ancillary airport. If we have a good airport somewhere convenient and accessible, why have two airports? Why waste the valuable inner city land on a nostalgic remnant of the past, when it can be put to better use? (4/18)

We aren't like other cities: people don't say, "Hey kids, we're going to St. Louis! Yay!" (4/3)

inevitably follow the market. Several argued that San Diego is simply a more desirable destination than those cities that had failed to support two airports in recent years (Montreal and St. Louis).

For most participants, the desire for a permanent, long-term solution ultimately came to outweigh the benefits of sticking with Lindbergh. At every dialogue the group wound up agreeing that they wanted whatever solution was adopted to last for generations; they were emphatically opposed to the idea of having to make similar decisions again 20 years down the road. By the end of the day, majorities in five out of the six groups concluded that Lindbergh should eventually close.

Lindbergh is a great airport [but] I think it's ready to die.... I think its life has run out. San Diego has grown more than the airport can grow and I think there comes a time when you have to cut bait and do something better. (4/24)

Minority Committed to Keeping Lindbergh

Although the majority of participants agreed (sometimes reluctantly) that Lindbergh Field would have to close, in several groups a significant minority was unwilling to commit now to closing Lindbergh. Most participants in the “keep Lindbergh” camp did conclude that *if* two airports were for some reason impossible *and* the new airport met all their key conditions (international service, user-friendliness, convenience, etc.), they would support closing Lindbergh Field. But until they could be sure that this is the case, they saw little reason to discard an airport with many attractive qualities.

We don't necessarily want to see Lindbergh Field phase out but the probability is that it would. Lindbergh may survive and thrive, but maybe it won't. (4/17)

If we build a second airport, Lindbergh will die on its own. But we shouldn't kill it. (4/17)

However, even Lindbergh’s strongest partisans came to believe that the older airport will probably phase out over time (both economically and psychologically). As they saw it, after the new airport begins operations, Lindbergh may not continue to be commercially viable; in addition, as the new airport takes shape, some of Lindbergh’s luster may dim. For the most part, these participants found the idea of a more “evolutionary” phase-out for Lindbergh acceptable, even if saddening.

While the “Supplement Lindbergh” scenario started the day as the highest ranked option (at 6.3), it dropped nearly a full point by day’s end to the second lowest option – at a final mean of 5.4, ahead only of “Improve Lindbergh.” Participants’ ratings of this scenario also showed the largest negative net shift of the day at –18 points.

D. Strong and increasing support for Scenario 3 (replacement airport)

As the appeal of piecemeal solutions waned, along with some of participants’ attachment to Lindbergh, support for a replacement airport grew significantly.

For most participants, the major “pulls” toward a replacement airport included:

- The opportunity to do it right the first time rather than relying on ad-hoc solutions. Many participants argued that building a new airport would allow San Diego to design a facility that really works for the region and to incorporate plans for future expansion into the earliest stages of the project.
- The convenience of a single, full-service airport providing San Diegans with “one-stop shopping” for all their air travel needs.
- Alternative uses for the Lindbergh Field site. Suggestions for the site ranged from housing and transit centers to commercial development to recreational uses, and many participants found the redevelopment potential extremely exciting.

Constructing a new airport would be good for the economy. It would create jobs. Closing Lindbergh would be beneficial – it could be used for development, low-cost housing, relieving traffic. The present airport is a disaster, and it has to be scrapped. (4/18)

Participants across the board insisted that they were not willing to give up Lindbergh Field for anything less than a world-class airport, and they had several conditions for what such an airport should include. The most important for all groups was that the airport be centrally located – meaning that it be accessible from most parts of the county in less than an hour. Other important conditions included that the new airport be easy to get to, both by car and by mass transit, and that it be attractive and inviting.

If we're going to give Lindbergh up, let's go for the max. Let's build a great airport. (4/3)

The “replace Lindbergh” scenario showed a dramatic rise over the course of the day, from third place in the morning (at 4.9) to clear front-runner in the afternoon at 7.1. This choice also showed the broadest-based change over the course of the day, with a net shift of +45 points.

E. Aeroplex: A proxy for planning

Aeroplex growth ... would require a whole different kind of planning.... It's not just a bigger airport for more people. (4/24)

Many participants were intrigued by the notion of building an “Aeroplex” that would combine a new airport with a multi-modal transportation hub, plus incentives for housing and high-tech commercial development centered around the airport complex.

However, it is important to note that this interest did not translate into widespread support for moving forward with Aeroplex-type development at this time. While they found the concept thought-provoking, participants were skeptical about how such a proposal would work in practice. They doubted that San Diego’s fractious local governments and regional agencies could ever work together in the way that this proposal would require, and they were deeply concerned that the cost was prohibitive, especially in the current economic climate. Instead of taking shape as a concrete proposal, the Aeroplex choice became a way for participants to discuss their attitudes towards planning.

If you're going to be building a big airport, build it having in mind that some day you'll want to expand it with the high-speed rail and stuff like that. Not that it's feasible right now, but just so we don't have to go look for another spot where it is feasible in 25 years. (4/24)

Participants' strongest common ground was that the Aeroplex represented a vision for the future – not something to do right now, but something to work towards. Many suggested an evolutionary or phased-in approach, in which San Diego would first build a replacement airport (as outlined in Scenario 3) and then expand that into an Aeroplex when demand materializes and the economic situation permits. Many participants were eager to include planning for future Aeroplex

development in the initial design of a replacement airport, and they argued strongly for laying the groundwork now – acquiring the land, planning how the airport would fit into a regional transportation network and considering how airport-related development should be managed to maximize the future benefit for the region. They showed a broad-based awareness that the airport is more than just an airport – it represents an opportunity to rethink how the region works, and to plan proactively for the future.

Overall, participants were hungry for good planning. They expressed deep dissatisfaction with San Diego's track record in this regard, and they felt that previous large-scale projects in the region as a rule have not been planned or executed well. In all six sessions, participants were clear that good planning for future growth and development cannot be accomplished in the piecemeal, ad-hoc fashion San Diego has relied on thus far. Those who liked the Aeroplex scenario liked it because of its explicit emphasis on planning, integrated development of housing and transit, and incorporating multiple forms of transit into airport design and development. But even those who did not embrace the vision of an Aeroplex per se agreed that good planning and a long-term vision are essential.

Our politics go by incrementalism because we always go by the safest route – we don't want to upset anyone. But that means we either do nothing, or we do so little it amounts to nothing in the long run. (4/24)

A polarizing choice

While there was considerable positive interest in the Aeroplex option (at least in the abstract), this was a deeply polarizing choice. Participants with reservations about growth found the Aeroplex concept profoundly unappealing – a recipe for traffic, congestion and unchecked development. Many of these participants were vocal in their dismay at the prospect of “making San Diego more like Los Angeles,” and wanted to avoid any scenario that seemed to move San Diego in that direction. The Aeroplex scenario fared particularly poorly in these participants’ written evaluations at the end of the day, often being described with comments like “No!” “Hell, no!” and “Ugh!”

We didn't like the idea of an Aeroplex where you have housing and all this other infrastructure around the airport. If you build it they will come, more and more and more. (4/17)

The animated conversation around the Aeroplex scenario did not translate into a large change in how participants ranked the choice before and after dialogue. The ranking started high and remained high (from 5.9 to 6.1) but it also showed little movement overall, with only a +7 point net shift. Those who liked it kept on liking it, while those who disliked it kept on disliking it (often vehemently). This indicates that while a plan of this sort would have some appeal, it would also encounter powerful and vocal resistance if presented in this form.

F. Paying for it

Participants showed a strikingly broad-based willingness to pay in order to get the results they desire. They understood that the features they wanted in a new airport would involve a significant public investment (for mass transportation and other infrastructure that would serve the region as a whole) and they were willing to make that investment, on the conditions that there be accountability and that the cost be in line with the expected benefit. While they would by no means write a blank check for airport development, they also warned against short-sighted frugality, arguing that cutting corners now would have negative effects down the road.

We don't just want to build a cheap airport. We've got a cheap airport now! (3/13)

Initially I thought, let's just let the users pay for it. But when you think of the ramifications an airport brings for business I may benefit from it after all. It might give my kid a job. So maybe I ought to bear some of that burden of paying for that airport. The cost has to be shared by the whole community. (4/17)

Participants were also quite clear that they want the burden of paying for the airport to be spread across the region. While all the groups considered mechanisms that would place the burden primarily on tourists, travelers or other subsets of the population, each group concluded that the entire region – travelers and non-travelers alike – stood to benefit from airport activity, and that everyone should share in the cost of developing better airport facilities and infrastructure.

Making Use of Military Bases: That said, participants were also eager to find ways to contain costs. In particular, most liked the idea of using a military base as an airport site if one becomes available, seeing this as a way of offsetting some of the cost of construction. Many pointed out that many San Diego's military bases already have necessary infrastructure like runways and fuel facilities in place; therefore it would cost less, displace fewer residents than other centrally located options, and make efficient use of existing resources. A few participants stated that losing a few local military jobs was a small price to pay for so many advantages.

We want political leaders to make a pitch to BRAC. We may lose some military jobs now, but in the future it will create so many more jobs. (4/17)

Part Two: Session 4 – A Cautionary Tale

In our experience conducting extended series of dialogues, we have occasionally found that the results of a single session appear to be out of step with the rest. This usually can be traced to one of two factors: either a few dominant or vocal individuals exert a strong influence on the discussion, or something is said or happens in the course of the dialogue that affects the climate of the conversation.

In Session 4, both of these conditions came into play. While the composition of the group was demographically indistinguishable from the others, there was a larger than average contingent of vocal and articulate participants with strong anti-growth views. These participants were deeply committed to preserving San Diego's small town ambience. Their concern that San Diego is in danger of "becoming like Los Angeles" – sprawling, overcrowded and congested – led to a less open, more mistrustful tone early in the day. In addition, this group reacted intensely when pressed on an issue before they were ready to engage it, in ways that dramatically affected the day's outcome.

A. Strong initial similarities to other groups

In many ways, Session 4 participants responded to the scenarios exactly as other groups did. Their list of conditions a new airport would have to meet were identical to those laid out by the other groups, and when they began to assess the scenarios they gravitated quickly towards Scenario 2 (a supplemental airport), just as the other groups did. Like several other groups, they dismissed the argument that airlines will not support a two-airport solution in this region. San Diego, they insisted, is big and important enough to support two airports, and the airlines will realize this and agree to a supplemental airport. Facilitators responded as they did in every dialogue where participants settled early on a particular scenario: by pressing participants to consider the risks and tradeoffs implicit in their conclusion.

Whether or not we can have two airports is a matter of expert opinion. And what's an expert? A guy from out of town with a briefcase. (4/17)

B. An outburst of mistrust

However, when facilitators pressed for what Session 4 participants would support *if* the airlines *did* reject a supplemental solution, the tone of this dialogue shifted noticeably. Primed by their underlying mistrust, participants worried that their stated choice was not being heard and that they were instead being guided toward an alternative solution they did not want. Their trust in the dialogue process and the information in their workbook was significantly affected, and several raised questions about whose interests the dialogue was intended to promote.

The problem I have is, in whose best interest is this? Is it in [the experts'] best interest or is it what's best for us?

Are you trying to guide us here? I don't know who these experts are. (4/17)

The breakdown in trust is starkly reflected in the quantitative results for this day. Session 4's initial rankings of the scenarios were comparable to those from other groups. By the end of the day, however, participants' evaluations of the choices had diverged dramatically from the conclusions reached by the other groups:

Table 1
Final Mean Values – All Other Groups Versus Session 4

	Final Mean: All Other Groups	Final Mean: Session 4
Improve Lindbergh	4.2	7.3
Supplement Lindbergh	5.4	8.6
Replace Lindbergh	7.1	2.6
Aeroplex	6.1	3.3

Prepared by: Viewpoint Learning, Inc.
Source: Viewpoint Learning, Inc., Ricondo & Associates, Inc.

Participants in this session overwhelmingly opted to stick with Lindbergh for the long term, with big jumps in favor of Scenarios 1 and 2. By the same token, this group strongly resisted discussion of any solution that would result in closing Lindbergh Field prematurely, which translated into large drops in their approval for Scenarios 3 and 4. Making do with Lindbergh's limitations struck them as far less risky than having their options narrowed to something that they felt wasn't in their best interest.

In addition, the tone of this group's remarks was more mistrustful than in other groups. Session 4 participants showed a striking conviction that the public's wishes often are not taken seriously when business and governmental interests are at stake.

C. Lessons for leaders

This session provides some valuable cautionary lessons for decision-makers. First, it shows how the public can turn on even a well-conceived solution if they feel they are being manipulated or their best interests are not being considered. Second, it shows the importance of allowing citizens to do the difficult work of making tradeoffs themselves. When pushed too quickly to accept a solution before *they* were ready to move towards it themselves, these participants rejected both the solution and the messengers.

The third, more subtle, point is that mistrust is not linear. It does not increase or decrease gradually, and once it is entrenched it cannot be easily overcome. Rather, it is a “tipping point” phenomenon: when the Session 4 participants reached their collective tipping point, they were no longer open to considering a wide range of solutions, and no amount of information or reassurance could restore openness. Once a dialogue group – or the general public – reaches this critical threshold, the well is poisoned and the reserves of trust necessary to approve or implement major policy changes cannot be rebuilt quickly or easily.

As it works to draw up a ballot initiative for 2006, the Authority must carefully consider this tipping point. If people feel that a given proposal takes citizens’ views as well as interest groups’ into account, and that the public is being given a chance to consider it carefully, they will be more open to bolder solutions. And since the Authority’s perceived trustworthiness stands or falls in part on the public’s general perception of local government (somewhat tarnished in the public eye by recent controversies), it is especially vital that the public’s input be seriously considered *and that the public feel that this is the case.*

IV. Other Findings

A. Potential benefits and drawbacks of airport development

In addition to the before-and-after ratings of the four scenarios, participants answered a series of questions at the end of the day about potential benefits and drawbacks of a new airport. Their rankings of these benefits and drawbacks – in other words, their assessments of what was valuable and what was threatening – were remarkably similar across all six groups.

Benefits

Participants indicated how strongly they felt about several potential benefits of airport development. In rank order of importance, participants rated these benefits as follows:⁴

1. Provides jobs. In all six sessions, participants rated additional jobs and economic growth as the most important potential benefit of developing a new airport. In addition, while participants saw tourism as a vital part of San Diego's economy – and Lindbergh Field as a particularly attractive and convenient facility for vacationers – they also recognized that tourism represents only one piece of the overall picture. Many saw high tech as increasingly important for the region and wanted to encourage its development.
2. Improves public transit. While all groups agreed that automobiles would likely remain passengers' primary means of access to a new airport, most groups showed strong interest in ensuring that efficient alternatives are also available. A significant percentage of participants also favored using the construction of a new airport as an opportunity to improve San Diego's transit system and regional planning overall.
3. Lowers fares. Participants understandably liked the idea of lower fares, and they saw the link between increased airport capacity, greater competition and downward pressure on ticket prices. Relatively few participants indicated that high fares were a problem for them personally, but many felt that lowering ticket prices overall would help San Diego remain competitive as a tourist and convention center.
4. Adds non-stop flights. Participants who traveled frequently or with small children were most likely to cite the lack of non-stop flights as a problem.
5. Creates additional housing. While San Diegans see housing as a critical issue for the region, participants ranked this potential benefit as the least important in every dialogue by a large margin. Most saw little immediate connection between housing and a new airport and felt that any increase in housing would be driven by population growth, not by airport development per se.

⁴ Ratings of potential benefits and drawbacks represent an aggregate of all six sessions. Quantitative results can be found in the Appendix

Drawbacks

Participants also indicated how strongly they felt about several potential drawbacks of airport development. In rank order of importance, participants rated these drawbacks as follows:

1. Displaces a large number of people. Across the board, participants' greatest concern was displacement of residents. Participants repeatedly urged that displacement be kept to a minimum and that people who lose their homes be fairly treated. However, they also recognized that some displacement was inevitable.
Displacement? Okay, if we have to, but we want to make sure we are doing it the right way, not willy-nilly. It has to be in line with the total benefit we get, and people should get fair market value for their homes. (4/18)
Displacement is okay, but let's arrange it so that we only displace other people! (4/18)
We don't want to take people's homes by eminent domain, but if we have to, then let's do it all at once. (3/13)
2. Threatens endangered species. Participants were clear that they would not accept a solution that damages endangered species, but they did not feel that this was a likely prospect. On the whole, they were fairly confident that existing environmental regulations would do an adequate job of protecting endangered species and that no further measures should be necessary.
3. Creates noise concerns. Most participants viewed noise, like traffic, as a necessary evil – to be mitigated as much as possible but impossible to avoid completely.
4. Increases traffic around the site. Careful planning to manage congestion and traffic was a high priority for every group.
5. Encourages closing of a military base. There was surprisingly little controversy about using a military base for an airport site: most participants found the idea eminently practical given San Diego's land crunch. Most military sites under consideration have the acreage required (some of it centrally located), as well as some existing infrastructure.
6. Increases travel time to and from the airport. Over the course of the day, participants revised the amount of time they were willing to travel to get to an airport upward from about 20 minutes to 45 minutes or an hour.
7. Requires local government to pay some of the cost. The notion of requiring local government to pick up part of the cost encountered very little resistance. Many participants had been surprised and relieved to learn that local taxpayers would not be required to foot the entire bill for airport construction. As noted earlier, as they came to understand the funding structure, they came to realize that some local money would be needed if the airport was to have the features they want, and they were willing to pay, provided the burden was spread fairly across the region.

8. Requires building on open space. Of all the potential drawbacks, participants showed the least objection to the idea of having to build on open space. While they saw open space as a precious commodity in San Diego, participants were in general more concerned with the difficulty of acquiring enough land to build a new airport facility with capacity to grow, and that became their top priority. Building on open space – especially on military bases, which did not really count as “open space” in most participants’ view – was far preferable to displacing large numbers of people. Provided proper mitigation procedures were followed, participants were willing to make the tradeoff.

I, too, would like to see the environment taken care of but I've lived in San Diego a long time and it seems to me if there's open land it's going to be built on. Its just a matter of acting and deciding – is it going to be an airport that supports all of us that's built on it or is it just going to be more homes, more traffic, and more congestion. I hate saying it, but the environment is going to be impacted whether we put the airport or homes on that land. (4/24)

B. Do it right, do it NOW.

Across the board, in every dialogue, participants expressed a real sense of urgency. As they came to understand the lead time required before any new airport could become operational, that sense of urgency became a constant refrain: we want to do it right, and we want to do it NOW. A sampling of quotes:

- *San Diego is going to run out of band-aids. We've put band-aids on everything, and the band-aids are breaking. We need to make a decision NOW. If 10 to 20 years from now we're still doing band-aids, [we're in trouble]. (4/3)*
- *It takes 10 to 20 years [to build an airport] – so we need to get out of our bubble and get something done! I don't want people 20 years from now to be thinking “how come they didn't think of that?” (4/17)*
- *A 10-year solution isn't good enough. We need a longer term solution! (4/18)*
- *We all agree we need to do something now – all this planning isn't going to happen overnight and there is a great sense of urgency. Our group talked about the way people have been debating it and doing studies forever. But we're going to run out of land so we won't have any options if we don't get the ball rolling. (4/24)*
- *No more studies. You're out of time. You're hearing it from us citizens – get on the ball, get on the wagon, let's go for it. (4/24)*

Citizens expressed deep frustration with the lack of action on the airport issue, and there was a strong sense that somebody has to step up to the plate and show leadership.

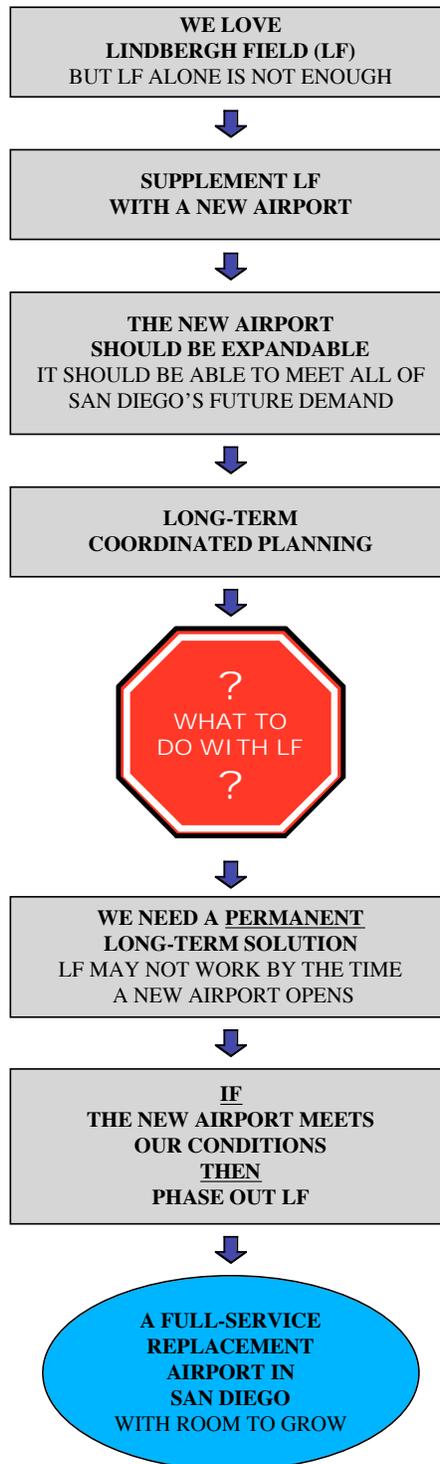
C. Participants' vision

These ChoiceWork Dialogues have made a promising contribution to the difficult task of outlining acceptable solutions to San Diego's airport issue, illuminating citizens' key values regarding air travel and regional development, and indicating how public views are likely to evolve as more people come to terms with the challenging decisions that must be made. Participants developed a deeper and more complex understanding of the problem and also discovered (sometimes to their surprise) that they share a great deal of common ground. As they engaged the four scenarios presented in the course of the dialogue, the participants built on this common ground to develop what is, in effect, their own scenario for the future of San Diego's air travel. Their vision can be summarized as follows:

Participant Scenario

We love Lindbergh Field, but we realize that Lindbergh Field alone will not meet San Diego's needs over the coming years. We want San Diego to build a new, full-service airport, and to do it soon. We also want planners to make provision for the eventual creation of a regional transportation hub and broad-based economic development around the airport in their planning and design. Whatever we build should be planned not for the next 15 years but for the next 50 years and beyond, and we are willing to pay up front for a solution that will meet our needs down the road. We value flexibility and adaptability: many of us are more comfortable with solutions that maintain some role for Lindbergh Field and/or phase it out gradually. San Diegans have a large stake in whatever decision is reached, and it is essential that ordinary residents be included in the planning process from the earliest stages. Our top priority is to give San Diego a truly world-class airport, one that reflects the best aspects of this region we love.

Evolution of Participants' Views



D. Social capital

Across the board, participants reacted strongly to the process as well as the issue at hand. Most saw the day as an important learning experience and felt that they had accomplished something valuable and worthy of being heard. Far from cynicism or apathy, the participants showed great willingness to engage in the hard work of making difficult tradeoffs, and at the end of the day expressed deeper sympathy for the challenges facing decision-makers.

I am amazed that a group of perfect strangers can get together and make more progress than the decision-makers have in years! (3/13)

I'm amazed at how many different opinions were in this room and no one killed each other! (4/18)

Participants were impressed with the amount of common ground they were able to establish, especially among people with widely divergent backgrounds and a variety of passionately held opinions. They particularly appreciated the dialogue format, finding it a refreshing and far more productive alternative to debate, and they were quick to police each other when the conversation threatened to slip into a more polarized mode.

Participants were also pleased and gratified that their opinions were being solicited and that decision-makers were listening. Several specifically thanked the SDCRAA for taking the initiative to elicit citizen perspectives, saying they were surprised and delighted that their opinions could really matter. Several other participants underscored the importance of continuing to include citizens in the planning process as it moves forward, pointing out that no effective solution can be created without citizen input and citizen support. Many were also willing to help build that support themselves by sharing their newfound knowledge with friends and neighbors, and they hoped that San Diegans in general would have the opportunity to be educated as they felt they had been through the dialogue.

Decision-makers can plan until the cows come home, but if the right people [i.e., citizens] aren't at the table contributing to those decisions then the plan will be like all the others that aren't done effectively and we will wind up with that albatross of an airport we are worried about. Put me on that panel! (4/18)

Across the board, citizens saw these dialogues as a hopeful sign that leaders were taking the airport question seriously. They hoped that the very fact that these dialogues took place might indicate that something would be done – and soon.

I've learned that the city [sic] is actually concerned about what the citizens of San Diego want, and they're doing these forums and dialogues. That's amazing, and it's a good thing. We've been talking about this airport for a long time.... All the information we've learned today, we should take it home and share it with our neighbors and friends so we can make good decisions. (4/18)

V. Interpreting and Building on the Results

It is important to remember that these findings do not reflect the general public's views today. Polls of the general public would likely yield results similar to those the participants themselves expressed at the beginning of their dialogues. Rather, the findings detailed above indicate where people *can* go, given the opportunity to work through the choices and the leadership to help guide the process.

A. The role of information

The ChoiceWork method comes out of a recognition that on difficult public issues it is imperative to get beyond the usual model of top-down, expert-driven information and education campaigns. Such a model is based on the mistaken assumption that information is all the public needs in order to reach a sound and stable judgment. If members of the public receive the proper information, this reasoning goes, they will then promptly make up their minds and do so in ways that are consistent with expert opinion.

However, as these dialogues show, members of the public make up their minds not on the basis of information alone, but on the basis of values, emotions, deeply held beliefs and the reactions of their fellow citizens. These factors play as great a role as information in shaping citizens' response to difficult issues, and they cannot be safely disregarded.

This was abundantly true in the case of the airport dialogues, as citizens integrated information with their deeply held values. Several key facts affected their thinking:

- That Lindbergh Field is the busiest single-runway airport in North America
- That an airport that could meet San Diego's projected demand would require approximately 3,000 acres, while Lindbergh Field has only 614 acres
- That it takes 10 to 15 years or more to plan and build a major airport
- That San Diego County is expected to grow by more than a million people in the next 20 years
- That airlines and other airport tenants, not the taxpayers, pay for airport construction and operations

At the same time other facts, equally important from an expert's perspective, did not resonate with many San Diegans, primarily because they came in conflict with citizens' values. Some examples:

- *Airlines are not likely to support a supplemental airport in San Diego because the region's projected demand does not warrant it from an economic standpoint.* Many participants simply rejected this out of hand, finding it incompatible with their belief that San Diego is a supremely attractive destination.
- *Over the next decades, most of San Diego's population growth is projected to come from the children of people already living here.* This did not resonate with some participants, who felt strongly that the problems posed by rapid growth must originate with people coming from other places.

- *Aviation experts believe that a joint-use arrangement (under which one of San Diego's military bases could be used simultaneously for military and civilian aircraft) may be technically feasible.* Most participants rejected this analysis, because it conflicted with their more fundamental value that a new airport must be designed first and foremost to serve San Diegans' civilian needs.

These dialogues were not designed to create citizen-experts versed in all the technical details of the issue. Instead, they were designed to shed light on which factors citizens take into account when making decisions about the airport and which are most influential. Key values such as the desire for long-term solutions, flexibility, financial prudence and appreciation of San Diego's quality of life were central to participants' responses. Leaders would do well to shape their engagement approaches around these values, rather than hoping to shift San Diegans with torrents of information.

B. The pitfalls of mistrust

The other key result illuminated by these dialogues was the danger that mistrust poses to finding workable solutions to this (or any other) difficult issue. Public mistrust – of government, business and other large institutions – is a powerful force in public life, both in San Diego and nation-wide. It is a particularly important factor to consider in San Diego, where several factors are converging to bring public mistrust perilously near the tipping point. These include:

- San Diego's recent track record. Participants pointed out examples of recent high-profile scandals ranging from the Chargers ticket guarantee to the indictment of City Council members, and they feared that an airport project could all too easily end up as a boondoggle that benefits a few powerful individuals and leaves citizens out in the cold.
- Nay-saying leadership. In the public's view, many leaders appear to be devoting more energy to publicly blocking proposals than to making constructive suggestions. This pattern heightens public cynicism and frustration, and leads citizens to believe that any proposed solution will only make things worse.
- A history of inter-agency turf battles. Participants in the dialogues emphasized that they want to see major stakeholders working together and speaking with a united voice. But they feared they would more likely see a future of turf wars, in-fighting and unremitting decision gridlock.

Under these circumstances, any leaders hoping to move forward with an airport proposal must assume a major burden of proof if they hope to overcome public skepticism and mistrust. They must demonstrate that the solution is responsive to citizens' concerns, that it offers a positive vision for the future, and that it has the support of a wide range of key agencies and stakeholders.

In addition, leaders must be sensitive to the importance of timing in overcoming citizen mistrust. As these dialogues showed, citizens must be allowed to do the difficult work of reconciling conflicting priorities (e.g.: "I want to keep Lindbergh" vs. "I want a long-term solution") without being rushed prematurely to a solution. Leaders who get too far ahead of the public or who appear to be at odds with basic public values run the risk of triggering mistrust.

C. Key themes

Several key themes emerged from these citizen dialogues that may help guide the SDCRAA as it works to craft a proposal and lead the public learning process on a larger scale. These are themes that San Diegans are prepared to hear now, and they can help lay the groundwork for ongoing engagement efforts:

- San Diego needs a new airport. San Diegans agree that Lindbergh Field alone is not going to meet the region's needs, and that San Diego must build a new airport that can take over that burden. Citizens see a series of benefits that a new airport can bring:
 - Provide jobs and enhance the local economy
 - Improve public transit, both to the airport and region-wide
 - Increase competition and lower fares
 - Provide more non-stop flights
 - Enhance international service

Citizens also have a series of key conditions that any new airport must meet:

- Centrally located, easily accessible
- Accessible both by car and by mass transit
- Efficient, well designed
- Beautiful – a symbol of, and gateway to San Diego
- Potential to accommodate San Diego's future growth and become San Diego's single airport in the future.
- Something must be done – NOW. Residents are frustrated that the political will to move forward has been lacking for the last several years, and they are unanimous in their call for San Diego to take action now, especially as land becomes scarcer and more expensive. The recent forecast that Lindbergh Field will begin to experience significant delays in as little as 11 years reinforces this sense of urgency.
- "We need to do it right." Citizens are frustrated and fed up with short-term, piecemeal, ad-hoc solutions. Whatever solution is reached must solve the airport problem once and for all – citizens do not want to have to face this question again in the foreseeable future. This means that they are willing to take some significant steps up front:
 - Acquire the land now. San Diegans are willing to take steps now to acquire all the land needed to develop a new airport, even if it means acquiring more land than will be used in the early phases of the project. Most citizens see the land issue as the key hurdle for airport development.
 - Emphasize long-term planning. San Diegans are hungry for thoughtful, long-term planning. With respect to the airport, many favor planning now for a facility that will work for decades, and that can be expanded and adapted as the region grows. They are also eager for plans that take into account how a new airport will affect growth, development and traffic surrounding areas over the long term.

The dialogues also revealed a number of themes that, if incorporated into proposals and campaigns, have the potential to move residents to consider bolder proposals for the airport.

- Support for evolutionary approaches. Many citizens are more comfortable with phased approaches that gradually shift traffic to the new airport and phase out Lindbergh. Similarly, many support building a new airport now and later expanding it into an Aeroplex. There are two major reasons for this interest in evolutionary solutions:
 - First, it makes it easier to come to terms with the eventual closure of Lindbergh Field. For many participants, allowing the airport to “gradually fade away” seemed more sensible (and less painful) than shutting it down while it still works well. In effect, these participants came to see a supplemental airport scenario as a bridge to their ultimate goal of a replacement airport.
 - Second, it allows greater accountability. Many citizens are not willing to make a blind leap of faith for this project; instead they wanted to keep their options open and see how the situation develops. Participants’ message was “we will trust you this far, and if you come through we’ll trust you a bit farther.”
- Decision-makers on the same page. Citizens are frustrated and turned off by obstructionism, turf battles and in-fighting among agencies and leaders. They will be more receptive to decision-makers who work together and speak with a united voice.
- A regional conversation. San Diegans understand that the airport has a profound impact on the entire region and on every resident, even those who never set foot on a plane. Dialogue participants were emphatic that a wide range of San Diegans must be involved in the planning and decision-making process, and that the discussion about airport solutions has to take place within a regional framework. Ongoing conversations cannot be held solely neighborhood by neighborhood – this would open the door to NIMBYism and further stalemate. Instead, the frame of reference must be regional.

Finally, there are trust-related themes that must be considered as decision-makers work to shape a proposal.

- We will trust you *only* if you listen to us. Citizens want their voices to be heard and to know that their opinions matter. They were deeply appreciative of having their opinions solicited in these dialogues. By the same token, they are wary of proposals that seem to be forced upon them at the behest of special interests. If they believe their interests are not being considered, they will reject even a well-conceived proposal, whatever the long-term cost. It is vital that the public’s input be seriously considered *and that the public feel that this is the case*.
- The importance of sequence and timing. San Diegans must be allowed to do the difficult work of reconciling conflicting priorities without being rushed prematurely to a pre-determined solution. Any leadership and engagement campaign that gets too far ahead of the public risks triggering mistrust.
 - The biggest case in point is the question of what ultimately becomes of Lindbergh Field. When they came to terms with the tradeoffs, most dialogue participants ultimately decided that Lindbergh Field will have to close eventually. However, this is not a point that the general public is ready to accept now, before they too have had a chance to come to terms with the tradeoffs. Dialogue participants followed a

predictable path as they moved from their initial strong attachment to Lindbergh to their conclusion that San Diego needs to replace Lindbergh with a new airport. Attempts to circumvent that sequence and leap immediately to the endpoint are likely to create resistance, not dispel it.

D. Opportunities for scaling up the conversation

These dialogues are an important first step in the process of citizen engagement, as SDCRAA has begun to engage different perspectives and the public is beginning to work through the implications of various solutions. The next step will be scaling up the dialogue to reach a wider audience and to translate these findings into a feasible proposal, a successful ballot initiative and (ultimately) a world-class airport for the San Diego region.

There will be many continuing opportunities for public engagement and education, which may be coordinated with key upcoming events in the process. Some of these key events include:

- Spring 2005. Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC). Several sites under consideration as possible locations for a new airport are currently active military bases. One or more of these bases may become available through the periodic Base Realignment and Closure process (or BRAC). Under BRAC, the Department of Defense closes, realigns or reorganizes military bases in order to streamline operations and reduce costs. The next round of BRAC proposals will be published in Spring 2005.⁵
- Spring-Summer 2005. Site Selection. Once the BRAC list is published and the final list of potential sites is finalized, SDCRAA will engage in an intensive analysis and study of each site. This analysis will include opportunities for public input.
- Summer 2006. Final Site Recommendation. In Summer 2006, the SDCRAA Board will issue its final recommendation for a site to augment or replace San Diego's airport.
- November 2006. Election. The SDCRAA Board recommendation will be on the ballot for a county-wide vote.

San Diegans will have many opportunities to get involved in the process, including public meetings of the SDCRAA Board. The schedule is available, along with more information about opportunities for citizen input, on the Authority website:

<http://www.sdcras.org/authority/index.asp>

Conclusion

This ChoiceWork project has highlighted the powerful role dialogue can play in engaging citizens on difficult policy questions and the valuable contribution that citizens can make when hard choices are on the table. While experts and stakeholders provide essential technical input, any sustainable solution must be consistent with citizens' values, beliefs and priorities. This project has demonstrated that the disconnect can be bridged – that citizens' values and technical

⁵ SDCRAA has agreed to support San Diego's active military bases through the BRAC 2005 process by postponing full review of military sites until after March 2005. Only "critical path" work, such as seasonally sensitive environmental and biological studies, will be conducted

considerations can mesh and mutually reinforce each other. A broad-based effort to continue this engagement and build on this common ground will be vital to resolving the airport question for the future of the San Diego region.

For more information on San Diego's airport, please visit the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority website at:

<http://www.sdcaa.org/authority/index.asp>

Appendix A

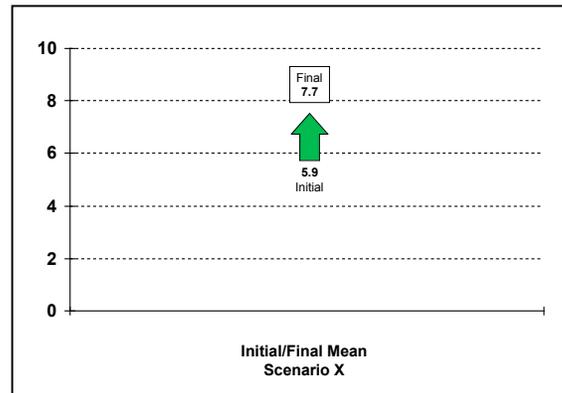
Quantitative Findings

In each of the dialogues, participants were surveyed twice, once at the beginning of the day and again at the end. They were asked to rate their response to each choice independently on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being “totally positive” and 1 being “totally negative.” These results were tabulated after the dialogues to determine both the average rating of each scenario and how each individual changed his or her views over the course of the day.

In the following pages, quantitative results are expressed in terms of means and shifts.

- Means: The initial mean for each scenario indicates participants’ average rating of the choice in the morning; the final mean represents participants’ average rating of the same scenario at the end of the dialogue.

On the mean charts, the arrow indicates the direction of the change in mean, moving from initial to final.



- Shifts: The “shifts” measure how widespread opinion change is within the group, as well as the direction of that change, by comparing individual participants’ ratings of each scenario at the beginning and the end of the day. For each choice, these are expressed in terms of positive/negative shifts and net shifts.
 - Positive/Negative shifts: If 25% of participants rate a scenario higher at the end of the day than they did at the beginning, and 5% rate it lower, then that scenario has a 25-point positive shift and a 5-point negative shift.
 - Net shifts: Net shifts combine the positive and negative shifts to show the overall movement in a scenario’s rating. In the above example of the 25-point positive shift and the 5-point negative shift, the net shift would be +20 points.

On the shift charts, the upper bar indicates the size and direction of the net shift, while the lower bar indicates the size of the total positive and negative shifts. Net shifts of less than 10 points are not considered meaningful.

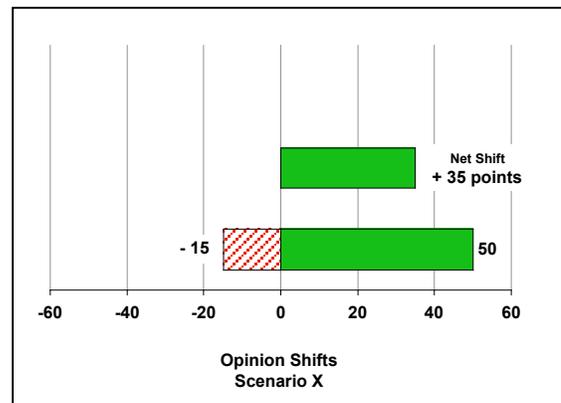
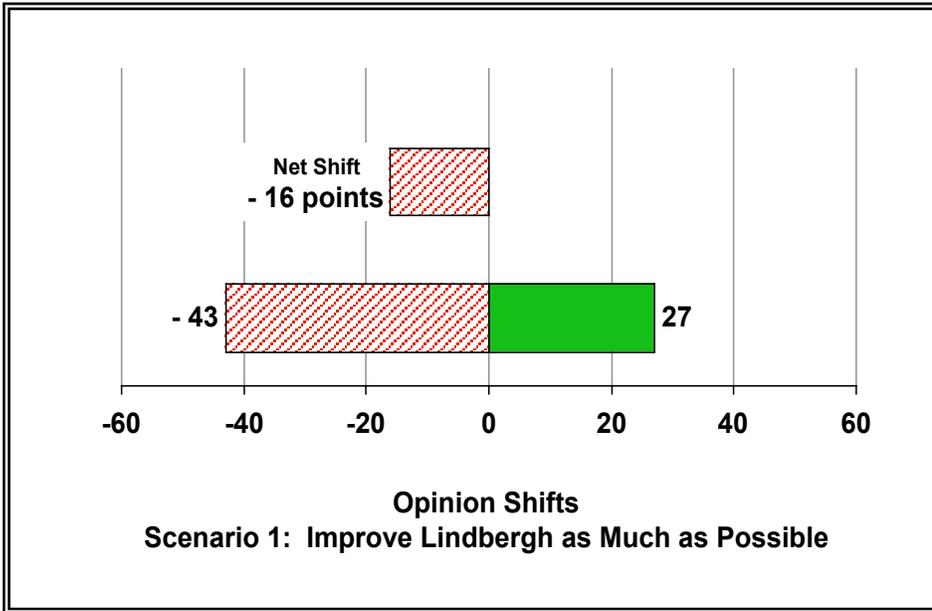
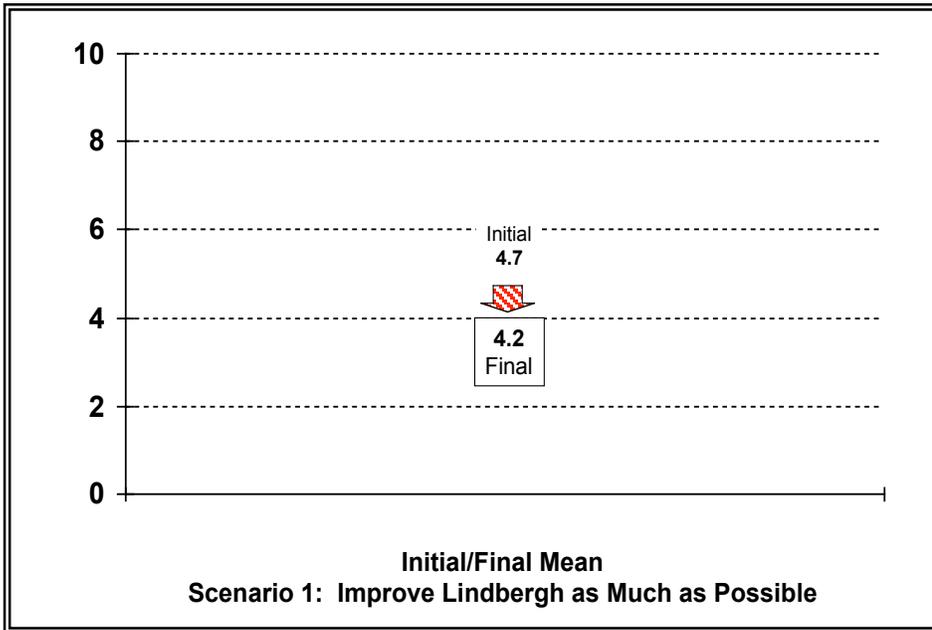


Exhibit A1

Scenario 1: Improve Lindbergh Field as Much as Possible

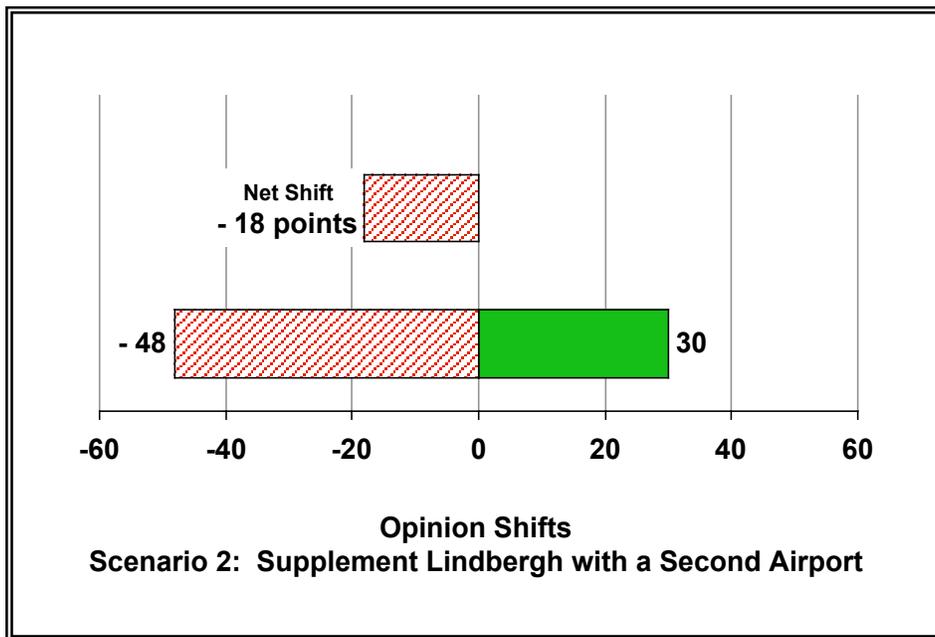
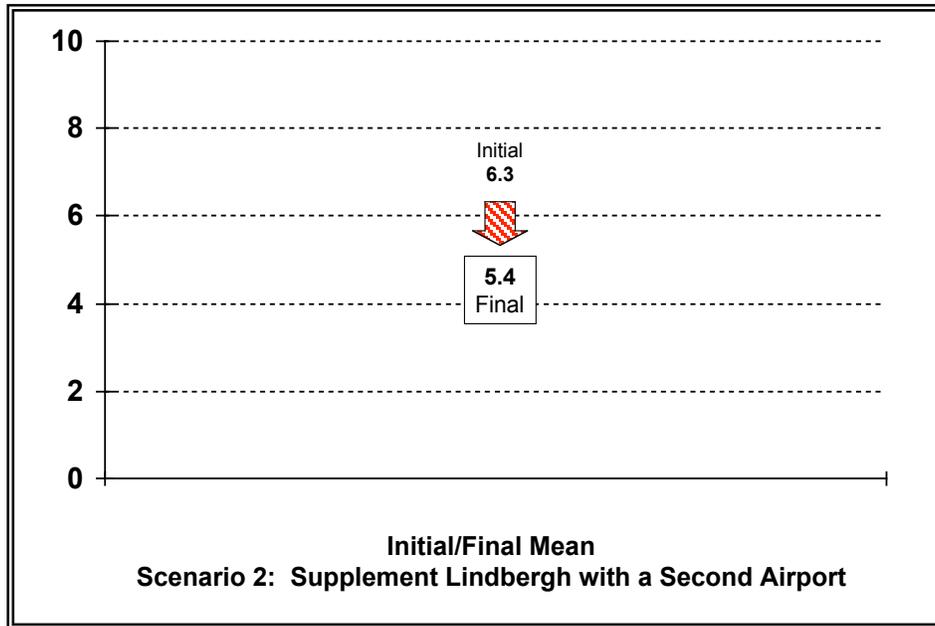


Note: Figures are an aggregate of the five “mainstream” groups

Source:
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Exhibit A2

Scenario 2: Supplement Lindbergh with a Second Airport

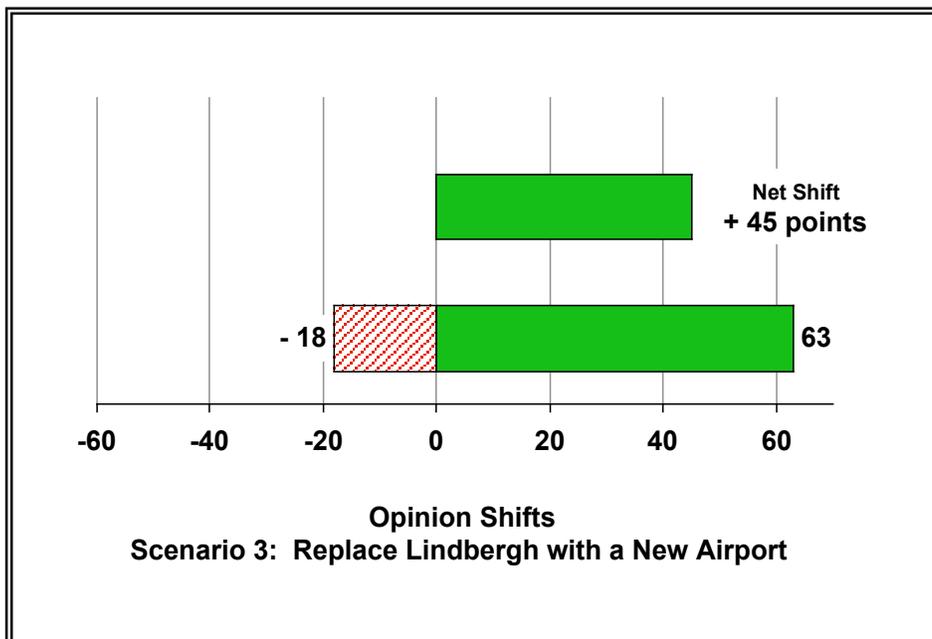
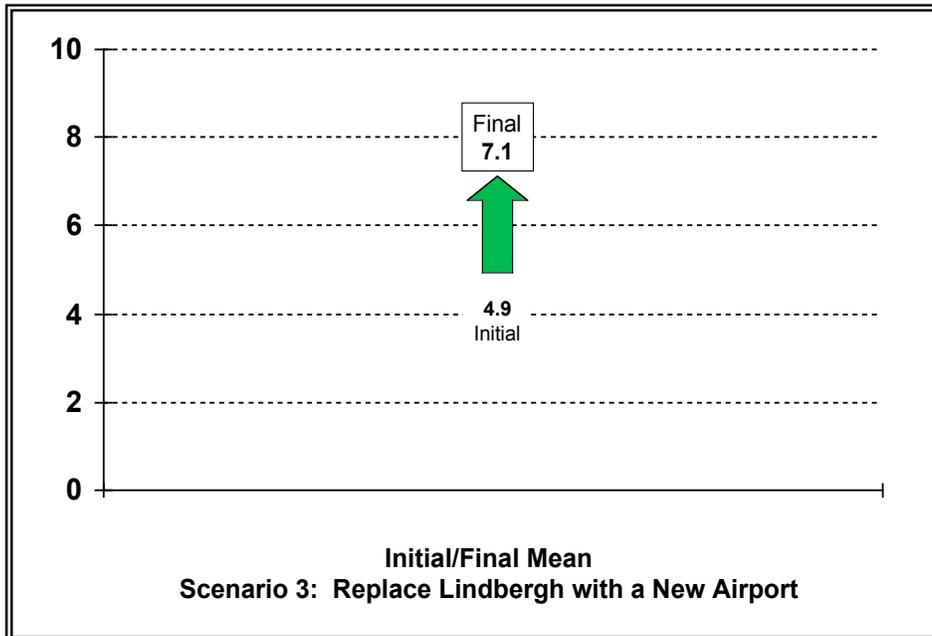


Note: Figures are an aggregate of the five “mainstream” groups

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Exhibit A3

Scenario 3: Replace Lindbergh with a New Airport

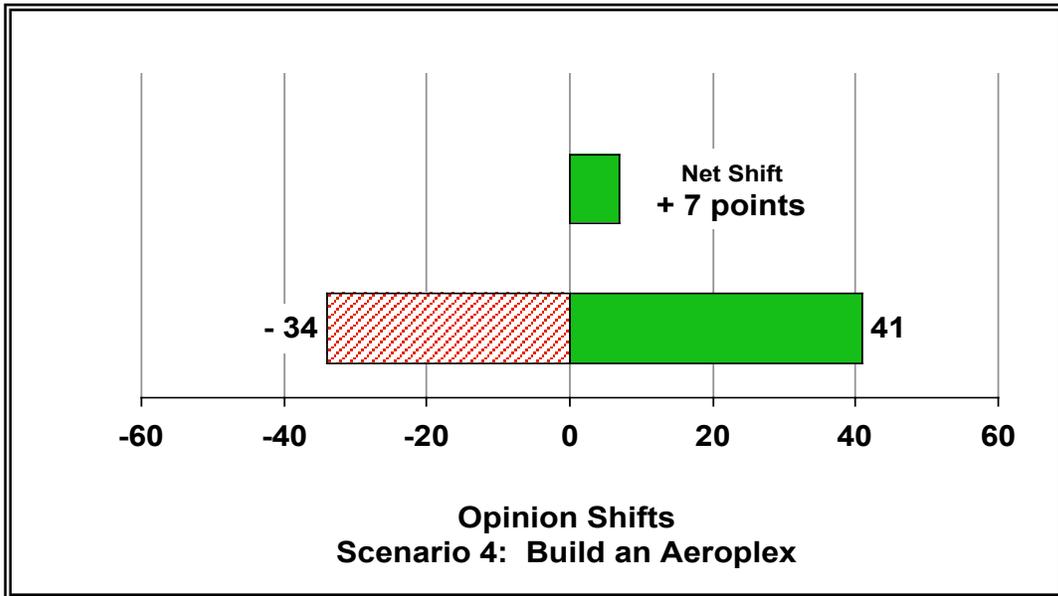
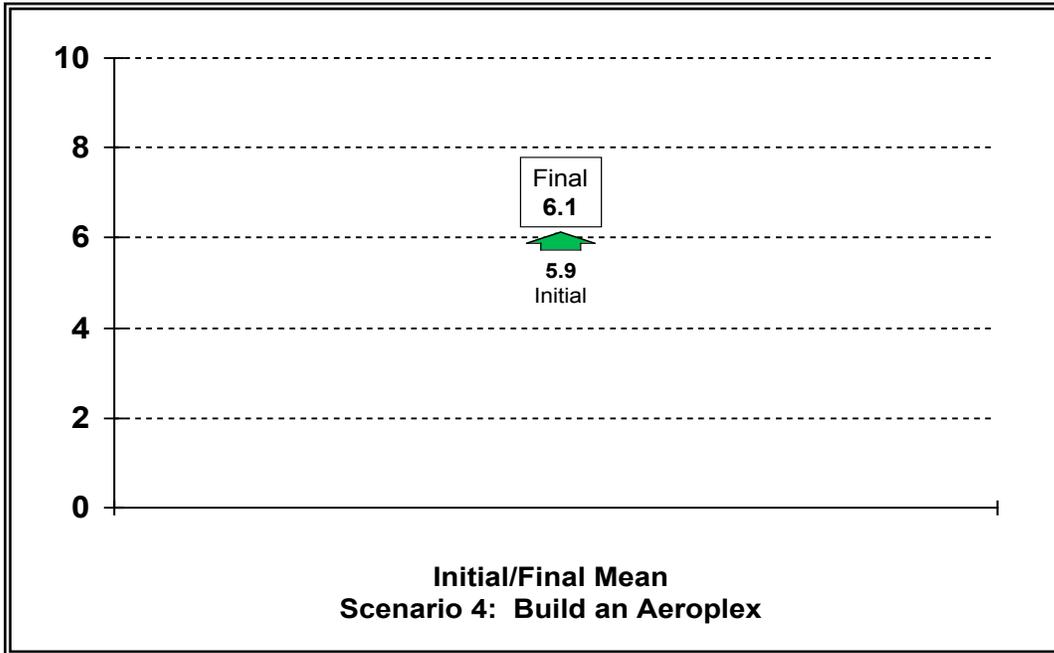


Note: Figures are an aggregate of the five “mainstream” groups

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Exhibit A4

Scenario 4: Build an Aeroplex

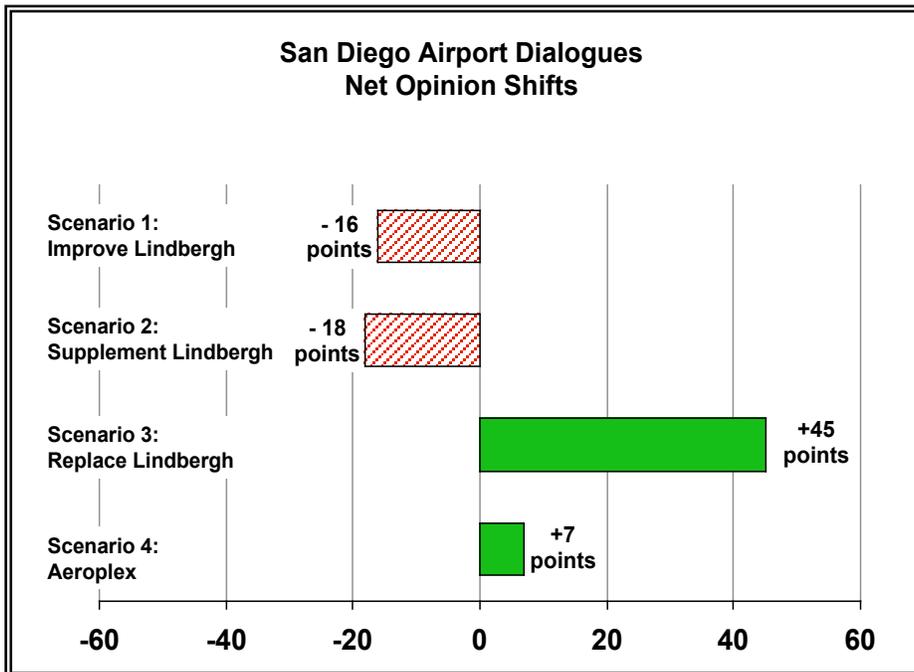
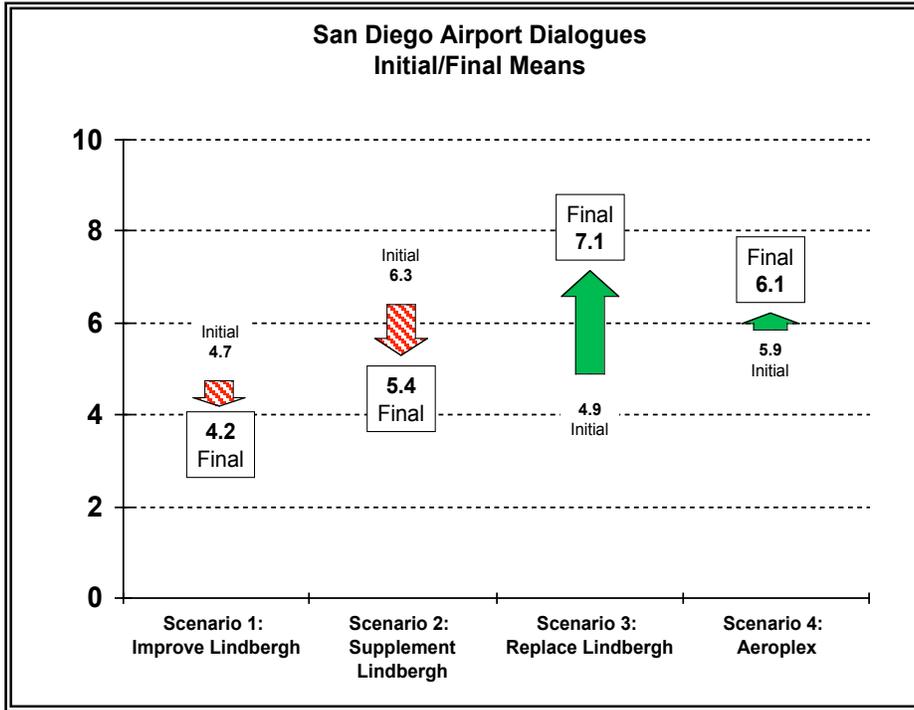


Note: Figures are an aggregate of the five “mainstream” groups

Source:
Prepared by:

Exhibit A5

Combined Ratings³ - All Four Scenarios



Source:
Prepared by:

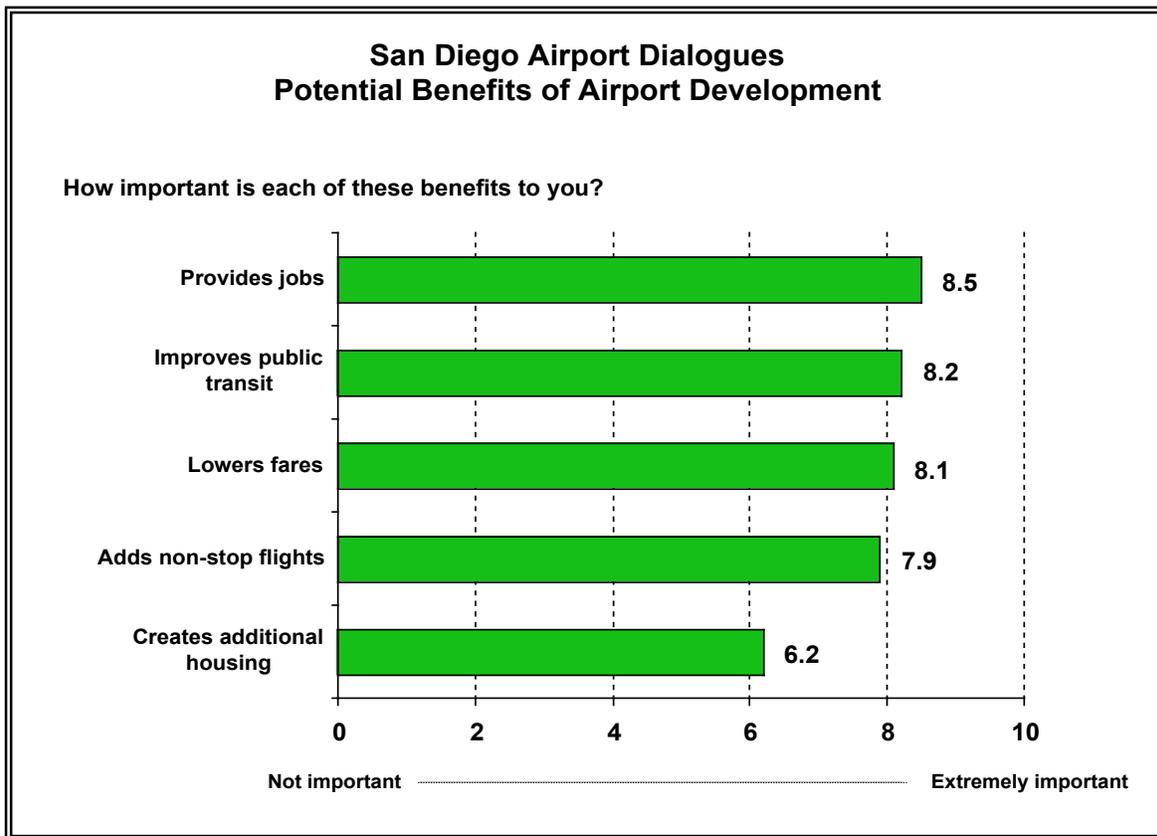
³ The above figures are an aggregate of the five “mainstream” groups. Session 4 results were as follows:
 Scenario 1: initial mean 5.3, final mean 7.3, net shift +43 - Scenario 2: initial mean 7.1, final mean 8.6, net shift +41
 Scenario 3: initial mean 5.1, final mean 2.6, net shift -48 - Scenario 4: initial mean 6.5, final mean 3.3, net shift -68

Potential Benefits of Airport Development

At the end of the day, participants rated each of the following potential benefits on a scale of 1-10, 10 being most important.

Exhibit A6

Potential Benefits of Airport Development



Note: Figures are an aggregate of all six groups

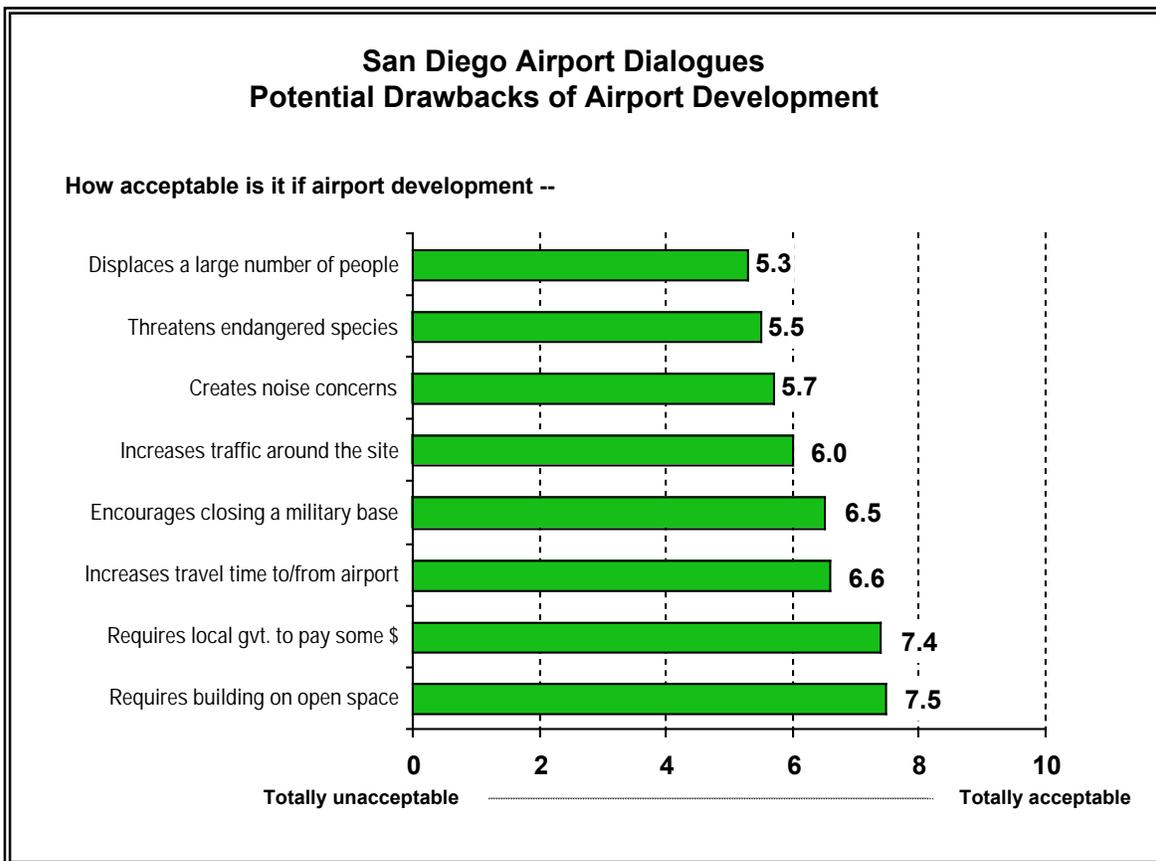
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Potential Drawbacks of Airport Development

At the end of the day, participants rated each of the following potential drawbacks on a scale of 1-10, 10 being most acceptable. (Note that lower figures indicate greater resistance.)

Exhibit A7

Potential Drawbacks of Airport Development



Note: Figures are an aggregate of all six groups

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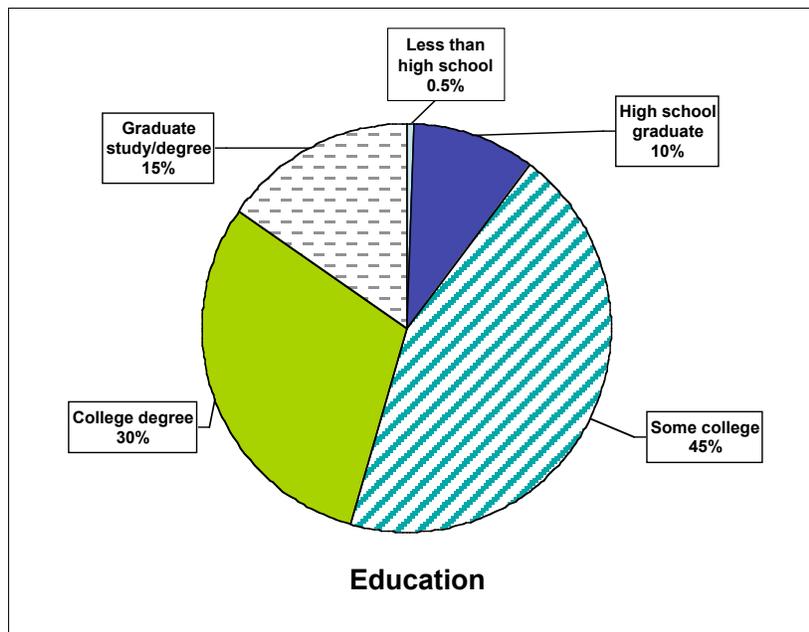
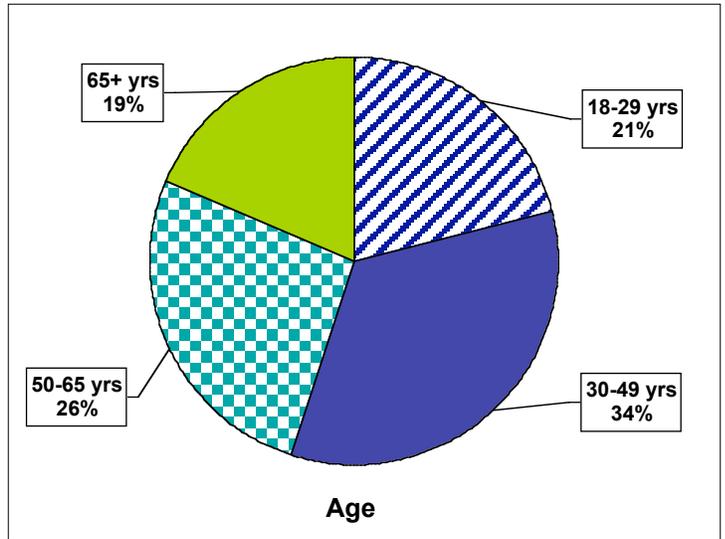
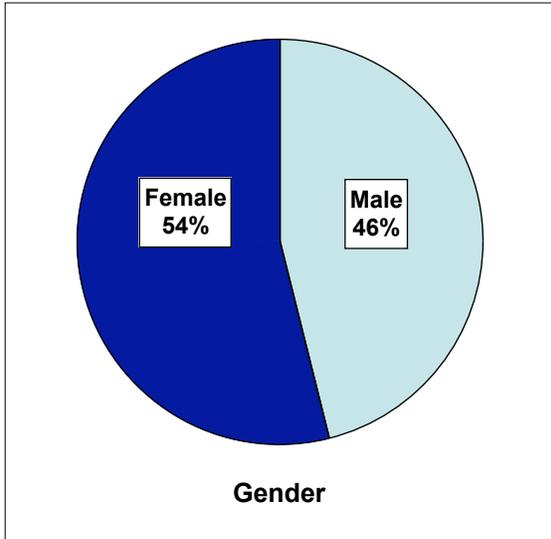
Appendix B

Participant Demographics

A total of 224 San Diego County residents took part in these dialogues.

Exhibit B1

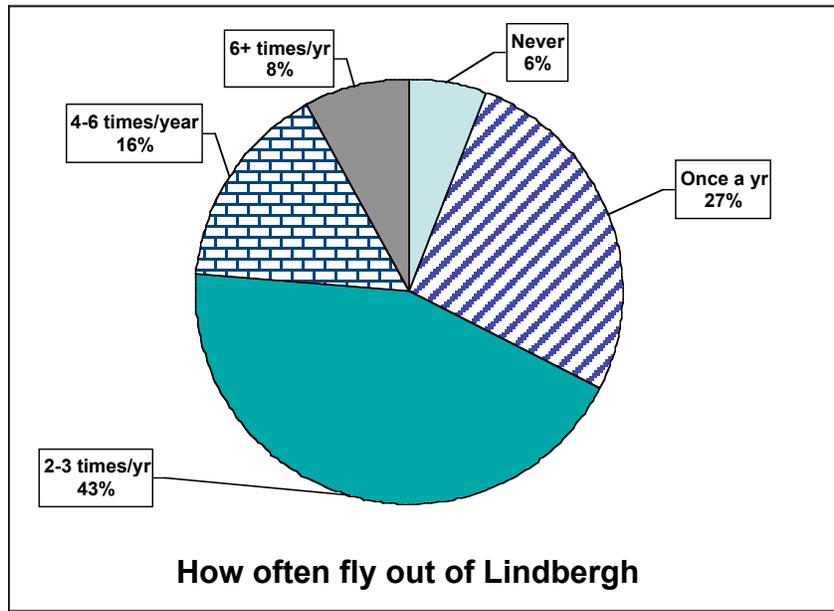
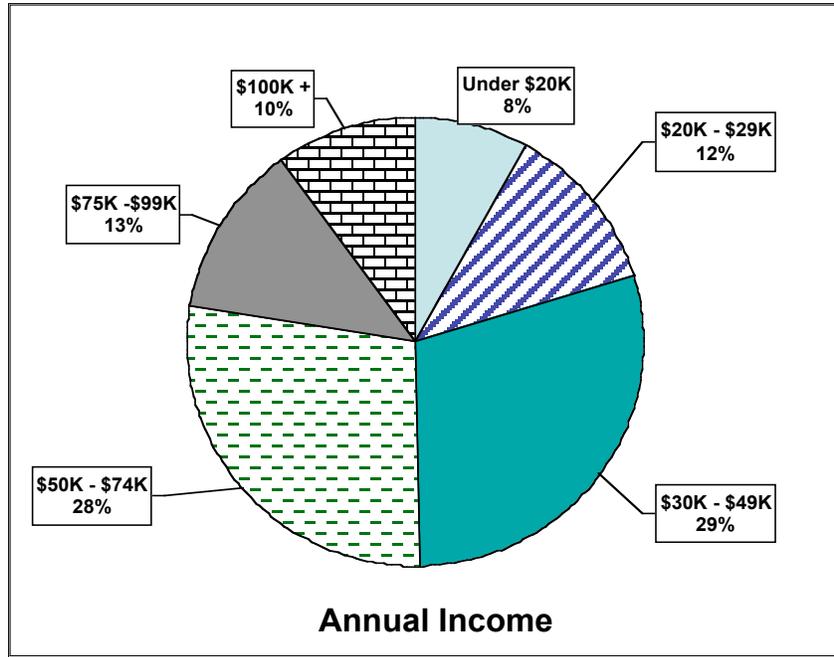
Participant Demographics



Source:
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Exhibit B2

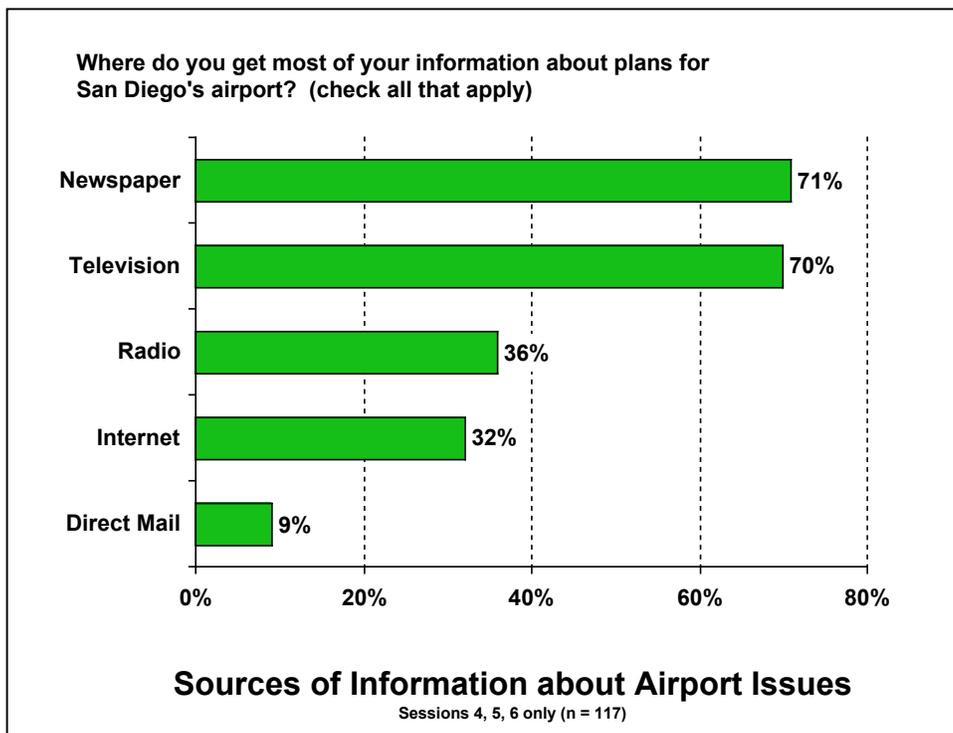
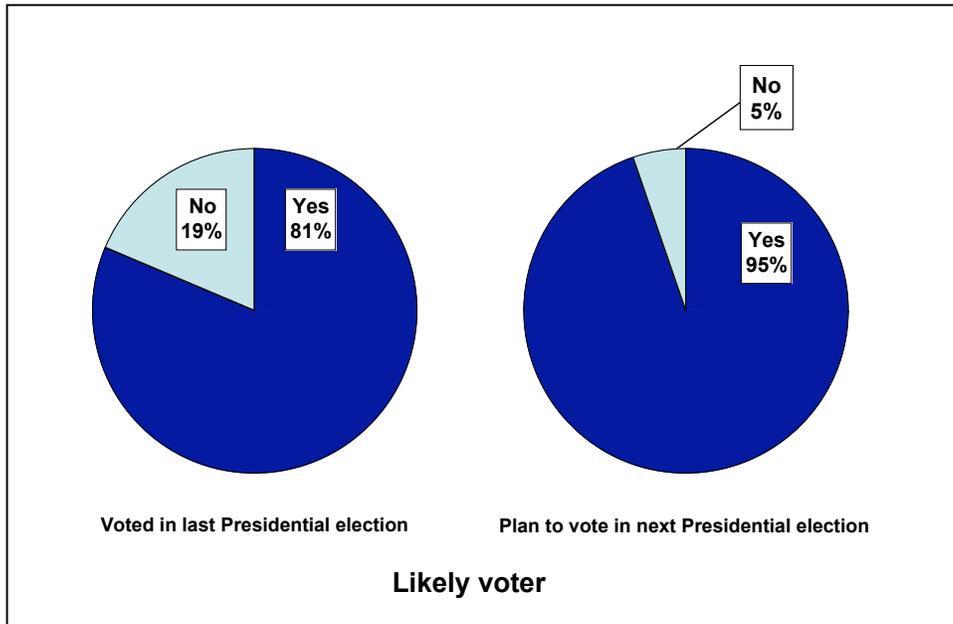
Participant Demographics (Cont'd)



Source:
Prepared by:

Exhibit B3

Participant Demographics (Cont'd)



Source:
Prepared by: