Governance models for U.S. airports or single
AIRPORTS

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Airline industry adjustments have
Review recent literature & consult
Case studies:
Hub Type: Percentage
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northern plains and vacation areas of the southeast
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Market
1.

1. BACKGROUND
Market dynamics of air transportation are rapidly changing,
with big implications for surface transportation in U.S. regions and megaregions.
Whereas proximity has traditionally driven air passengers’ airport choice, allowing metro
airports to attract the majority of passengers from the immediate region, today’s airports compete
fiercely with one another and draw passengers from far beyond their own regional borders, from
widely megaregional geographies.
The phenomenon, known as airport market leakage, means that planning for air service itself,
for ground transport access to airports, and for the economic development linked to airports increasingly must account for dynamics unfolding at the megaregional scale.

Limited examples of contemporary planning acknowledge both the growing megaregional
dimensions of urban transportation and the changes to megaregional transportation brought by
evolving airline industry dynamics and growing commuter shores for airport access. It is unclear
whether existing institutions for airport governance and metropolitan transportation planning can make these increasingly important connections at the megaregional scale and across the siloed domains for air travel, airport, and surface transport planning.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS
(1) What governance models are present among airports? How do they work?
(2) How do specific governance structures contribute to or hamper an airport’s engagement in regional and megaregional transportation planning?
(3) What formal and informal relationships exist between airports and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) responsible for surface transport? How do these parties share information or work together?
(4) Among existing governance models for connecting airports and metropolitan planning organization members, which governance structures and arrangements are most effective?

3. RESEARCH METHODS
This project will first review the literature and engage field experts to assess the state of knowledge about key issues and challenges in megaregional transportation planning and
contemporary airline industry dynamics.
Next, one or two regions or megaregions will be chosen for in-depth study. Case studies will observe, in a single geographic context, how and to what extent airport sponsors engage in regional and megaregional transport planning, models.

4. CASE SELECTION & APPROACH
Case selection will be informed by the literature and observations/field experts.

5. PROJECT PLAN
Summer 2018: Preliminary data collection and analysis
Fall 2018: Review recent literature & consult airport governance experts.
Spring 2019: Case studies: Data collection and analysis.
Summer 2019: Project report and paper.

I. RESEARCH AGENDA

1. Governance models for U.S. airports are diverse.
U.S. airports are governed in a wide variety of ways. These include general purpose governments at federal, state, county, and city levels. Other models use more narrowly focused special-purpose entities like airport or port authorities. The most common model is direct control of an airport by a municipality, followed by a state or locally created airport authority.

It is not clear that airport governance has been assessed explicitly from the perspective of megaregional challenges and concerns, like airport market leakage. Previous studies have examined the impact of individual governance models on airport performance but have been inconclusive (Reimer & Putnam, 2009).

2. Airline industry adjustments have concentrated airport activity spatially, creating winners and losers.
Work by Furlafti et al. (2016) suggests that airline mergers and the concentration of airline activity (measured as departures, passenger levels, and available seats) produced large gains in activity for regions like the northern plains and vacation areas of the southeast coast, but led to reduced airport activity in the Rust Belt and mountainous West. Airport passengers increasingly may leak from smaller, less well served to larger, better served airports (Ryan & Kim, 2018).

3. Metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) responsible for regional transport planning may have few mechanisms for considering implications of changing airport activity for regional transport systems.
In general, MPOs do not have voting board seats for airport sponsors, and committees dedicated to regional airports or air travel are rare. Yet, where airports are city- or county-operated, city or county officials on the board may convey airport concerns.