



Snohomish County
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Snohomish County to Establish World-Leading Research and Development Center for Sustainable Aviation Fuels at Paine Field

Partnership with Washington State University Will Create the First Sustainable Aviation Fuel Repository in the World

\$6.5 Million Proviso Proposed in the State Senate Transportation Budget Would Provide Start-Up Funding

Snohomish County, Wash., March 28, 2023 – Executive Dave Somers announced that Snohomish County is establishing a world-leading Research and Development (R&D) Center focused on Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) at Paine Field Airport. The project, which is a partnership with Washington State University (WSU), when combined with other WSU assets in Washington will create the world’s first SAF repository of this type for advancing sustainable aviation fuel technologies and serve the global need for reference samples to support research. The Center will also be the only facility to collect, sample, and distribute SAF at a scale needed for widespread use in the largest aircraft.

Washington State Senate Transportation Committee Chair Marko Liias is including a proviso in the proposed Senate Transportation Budget to provide \$6.5 million in start-up funding for the project. State Representative Brandy Donaghy is sponsoring the proviso in the House.

“Snohomish County is defined by our beautiful and abundant natural resources – protecting them is central to our way of life. We are also the global heart of cutting-edge commercial aerospace manufacturing, which has been an important economic driver of the county for over 50 years,” said Executive Somers. “With our history and resources, Snohomish County is the ideal place for businesses to invest in trailblazing climate change solutions. This R&D Center for Sustainable Aviation Fuels is a foundational component of our long-term commitment to generate new jobs in environmentally sustainable sectors and help decarbonize aviation.”

Snohomish County’s Paine Field Airport, a major hub of aviation and aerospace in the region, supports over 158,000 jobs and generates nearly \$60 billion annually for the economy. However, the continued success of commercial aviation depends on addressing the industry’s carbon emissions that contribute to global climate change. In Snohomish County, aviation is estimated to have accounted for five percent of Snohomish County’s total communitywide [greenhouse gas emissions](#) in 2019, which represents a 23 percent increase from 2015 levels.

“Investment in this new Research and Development Center marks an exciting milestone for our region. We have been at the forefront of the aviation industry for decades and this will now put us in a place to lead the world in shaping the future of clean aviation,” said Sen. Marko Liias. “This Center will play a vital role in reducing the environmental impact of air travel, while also fostering innovation and economic growth right here in Snohomish County.”

“I’m excited about the opportunity for Snohomish County to step forward as a leader in sustainable aviation fuel development, with an eye towards a healthier future for all,” said Rep. Brandy Donaghy.

“Washington state’s leadership in aviation and the environment was one of the reasons I moved across the country to join WSU. Here, the state is supporting efforts to meet global challenges while complementing existing strengths,” said

Dr. Joshua Heyne, a leading SAF expert and director of the Bioproducts Science and Engineering Laboratory at WSU Tri-Cities. “WSU research has enabled the inception of global policies and new technologies to benefit state agricultural and industrial activities from Pullman to Everett. We are proud to partner with Snohomish County, our state Legislature, and industry partners to once again meet a global need with local interests.”

“Snohomish County has been a leader in both aviation as well as environmental issues for decades. The new Research and Development Center highlights the nexus of these two industries in our region and how we continue to encourage innovation, strengthen our workforce and support economic vitality for our communities,” said Snohomish County Council Chair Jared Mead.

“Snohomish County has been the home to aerospace innovation for many years. This R&D facility for sustainable aviation fuels is the next step in advancing our aerospace industry. I am excited to see this partnership come together and look forward to the project funding request moving in the legislature,” said Snohomish County Council Vice Chair Nate Nehring.

With the R&D Center for SAF, the County and its partners are looking to change the industrial landscape by leading the world in the development, distribution, and adoption of new technologies to reduce the economy’s dependence on carbon-based fuels. To achieve that goal, the Center at Paine Field will support the following SAF components:

- Repository: SAF samples will be received, tested at small scales, indexed, distributed around the U.S. and world. This meets an immediate community need as a repository of this type does not currently exist.
- Finishing: SAF samples and production methods could be investigated to reduce costs and the impact on human health and the environment.
- Large-Scale Testing: SAF samples could be tested at large scales (by the thousands of gallons) needed to ensure safety and bring new fuels and products to market.

The County and WSU have identified the SAF repository as the most immediate need and the element of the project that can be implemented quickest. The Center at Paine Field will host a ‘bank’ of SAF samples from commercial and experimental SAF production methods. Paine Field, when combined with other WSU assets, will form the world’s first SAF repository with data management, storage, and distribution. In effect, the repository will do for SAF development what seed banks do for agricultural research.

Paine Field represents the ideal location for the R&D Center for SAF due to its proximity to the production of medium- and long-haul aircraft, defined as planes that seat at least 100 passengers and fly at least 150 minutes. These aircraft make up 73 percent of carbon emissions in aviation.

“SAF is in critical demand around the world. This industry-led Center will accelerate aviation’s global fight against climate change and strengthen Washington’s reputation as a leader in aerospace innovation,” said Emily Wittman, President of the Aerospace Futures Alliance (AFA) which oversees the Sustainable Aviation Technologies & Energies (SATE) cluster, one of nine innovation clusters in Washington.

The Legislature is expected to vote on a compromise transportation budget in the coming weeks. Concurrently, the County, WSU, and the AFA are releasing a Request for Qualifications to identify a contractor to develop a business plan for the Center. The plan should be complete in September 2023.

Anyone interested can find more information on the R&D Center for SAF [on this website](#).

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