A Summary

Selecting a Search Area for a New Major Airport

Part One: Three Candidate Areas

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New Airport Search Area
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Metropolitan Council's
New Airport Search Area Advisory Task Force

Dick Beens, co-chair
Josephine Nunn, co-chair
Liz Anderson
Beverly Boyd
Larry Buegler
Wayne Burggraaff
Steve Cramer
Jan Del Calzo
Marilyn Deneen
James Dommel
Ted Furber
Kathleen Gaylord
Benjamin Griggs
Edward Gutzmann
William Harper, Sr.
Beverly Hauschild
James Hearon III
Phyllis Hiller
Gene Hollenstein
James Jensen
Raymond R. Krause
Thomas C. Kayser
John Labosky
David Lawrence
Kay Louis
Thomas Morin
E. Craig Morris
Roberta Opheim
William Peterson
John Pidgeon
J. Michael Podawiltz
Dottie Rietow
Larry Sawyer
John Tschida
Ray Waldron
Marcy Waritz
Robert Worthington

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This is a summary of a draft of a report being considered by the Council's New Airport Search Area Advisory Task Force. It has been prepared by Metropolitan Council staff and consultants.

Metropolitan Council
Mears Park Centre, 230 E. Fifth St.
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101

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SUMMARY

Three candidate search areas have been identified for a potential new major airport to serve the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and Minnesota. A search area is a large tract of land within which an airport site can be selected. The areas have been identified by Metropolitan Council staff and consultants, with assistance from the Council's New Airport Search Area Advisory Task Force. The three candidate search areas are: 1) Anoka-Isanti-Chisago, approximately 102 square miles in size, located north of the Twin Cities; 2) Dakota, 115 square miles, located southeast of the Twin Cities in Dakota County; and 3) Dakota-Scott, 113 square miles, located south of the Twin Cities, primarily in Dakota County. (See *Fig. 1, Proposed Candidate Search Areas.*)

The three areas are being considered as part of a single, comprehensive effort, called the "dual-track" major airport planning process. One track, a new airport option, will result in the selection of a new airport site. The focus of this report is on the first part of the new airport option, and will result in designating a search area for a possible replacement airport for Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP). The Council and its task force are doing this work. The other track focuses on ways to improve the capacity of MSP airport, an effort carried out by the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC). The Minnesota Legislature, through its 1989 Metropolitan Airport Planning Act, requires the Council and the MAC to put the dual-track plan into action. The dual-track plan is under way because separate studies conducted by the Council and the MAC recently have shown that additional capacity will be needed at the current airport. Even with that capacity, the airport may not be adequate for the future.

The 37-member task force was formed by the Council in September 1989. The task force developed criteria, adopted by the Council in May, to be used in making its selection of candidate search areas. The task force and the Council have also completed a general screening of land in the 14-county area. They have determined that land is available to develop a new major airport.

The three candidate search areas emerged from a field of eight large land areas, or sectors, within the 14-county study area (see *Fig. 2, Screening Sectors*). The sectors are relatively close to the region's two metropolitan centers of Minneapolis and St. Paul, but outside the Metropolitan Urban Service Area (MUSA) and other built-up areas. (The MUSA is the fully developed and developing area of the region.)

The task force is expected to act on the three areas on Dec. 21. The Council has scheduled its action for Jan. 10, 1991. Then the two bodies will hold public meetings on the three candidate areas and conduct further analysis over the next 12 months to select a single search area by December 1991.

The following phase of the new airport track will be conducted by the MAC beginning in 1992. The MAC has up to four years to select a specific site within the final search area, complete development plans and prepare an environmental assessment.

The three candidate search areas were identified by using six criteria that the Council and task force adopted. They are: accessibility, environmental considerations (including natural as well as noise and air quality considerations), land requirements, general search-area characteristics,

airspace considerations and policy considerations.

Among the criteria, metropolitan accessibility and environmental considerations are probably the most important at this stage in the analysis. An area too remote from major population centers cannot function as an effective airport. Also, a new airport will need to be located in a way that does not damage the environment. In later stages--particularly in selecting a single site--cost, topography and local environmental factors will become dominant.

The expected travel time to the search area is probably the most useful single measure for airport users. Estimated travel times, discussed below, are based on highway and transit systems now planned for the year 2010. The travel times are conservative estimates, and are for peak-hour travel.

At this stage, a key environmental concern is to determine whether a particular candidate search area contains enough potential environmental problems to eliminate it from consideration. Two important environmental concerns--aircraft noise and air quality--will be considered in greater detail in each subsequent stage. Noise impacts generally have been considered in identifying the candidate search areas. The task force paid great attention to areas of low population density.

Following is a description of the three candidate search areas, including their location, accessibility, environmental concerns, and their overall advantages and disadvantages. The size of a final airport site, while considerably smaller than that of a search area, also will need to include a buffer zone of possibly three to five miles that will encircle the final airport site. A site can be located anywhere in a search area. Care should be taken in drawing conclusions from the following information, since much more detailed analysis will be needed in 1991 before the most promising search area can be identified.

ANOKA-ISANTI-CHISAGO CANDIDATE SEARCH AREA

Location

The Anoka-Isanti-Chisago candidate search area is centered on Isanti County north of the Twin Cities (see *Fig. 3, Closer View of Three Proposed Candidate Search Areas*). Its southern border edges into northern Anoka County and its eastern border extends slightly into Chisago County. The area is roughly 11 miles east-west, and 11 miles north-south. The area contains approximately 102 square miles, or 65,000 acres). It includes all or part of Isanti, North Branch, Athens, Oxford, Lent and Linwood Townships. It is located generally southeast of Cambridge, west of North Branch, northwest of Stacy and northeast of Bethel.

Starting at the northwest corner of the area, its northern boundary begins at the intersection of Hwy. 65 and Isanti County Rd. 19, just south of Cambridge, and runs east along Isanti County Rd. 19, north on Isanti County Rd. 12 and east again on Hwy. 95 to Interstate Hwy. 35 in Chisago County. The eastern boundary follows I-35 south to just north of Stacy. Its southern boundary goes west following the Anoka County line, dips south into Anoka County, continues west again following the Anoka County line, then curves northwest into Isanti County along Isanti County Rd. 56 to Hwy. 65. The western boundary runs north along Hwy. 65 back up to the starting point, County Rd. 19. The portions of the area with the best potential for an airport site are

located outside the seven-county Metro Area.

Access

The Anoka-Isanti-Chisago candidate search area is served by Hwy. 65 in the west and Hwy. I-35 in the east. The area is located about 35 miles north of both Minneapolis and St. Paul downtowns, providing equal access to both city centers. Peak-hour travel time from the downtowns to the area would be about 70 minutes. It is the farthest search area from MSP, at about 45 miles away. Peak-hour travel time from MSP would be about 70 to 75 minutes.

Environment

There are some lakes in the southeastern portion of the search area and some wetlands throughout the area, particularly in its northern portion. Biotic communities, plant and animal life of particular concern, are found primarily near wetlands and lakes. The search area is close to the Carlos Avery State Wildlife Management Area to the south, and the University of Minnesota's Cedar Creek Natural History Area to the south and west. Also to the south is the Anoka and Isanti Counties Game Refuge. Two other smaller wildlife areas are nearby. One is to the south and the other, the Athens State Wildlife Area, is just outside the area's western boundary. A small wildlife area lies within the southern part of the search area.

Advantages and disadvantages

Among the advantages of the Anoka-Isanti-Chisago candidate search area is good access to population centers to the south via I-35 and Hwy. 65. The area is equidistant from Minneapolis and St. Paul downtowns. Some areas of low density exist within the search area, and there are fewer wetlands and lakes in the area's western portion. There are several possible airport locations in the area.

Among the disadvantages are environmental concerns. They include a large number of wetlands in some areas, proximity to the Carlos Avery Wildlife Refuge and the University of Minnesota Cedar Creek Natural History Area. The area has a relatively high water table and it is an area for groundwater recharge. It contains a large number of biotic communities, and a large population of birds and water fowl.

Other disadvantages include relatively high household densities throughout the Anoka County portion and along Hwy. 65 and I-35. The area also is located a significant distance from the region's population centers.

DAKOTA CANDIDATE SEARCH AREA

Location

The Dakota candidate search area is located completely in Dakota County (see *Fig. 3*). The area is roughly 17 miles east and west, and 8 miles north and south. It covers about 115 square miles, or 74,000 acres. It comprises major parts of Empire, Vermillion, Nininger and Marshan Townships. The search area is generally located east of Farmington, south of Rosemount

(including a southern portion of Rosemount), southwest of Hastings, and north of Miesville, New Trier and Hampton.

Starting at the area's northwest corner, the area's northern boundary begins at a point where Lakeville, Apple Valley and Rosemount all meet. The boundary runs east along the southern city limits of Rosemount, moves north into the southern portion of Rosemount and continues east along W. 145th St., E. 140th St. and finally Hwy. 55 to Hastings. The eastern boundary follows the Hastings city limits southeast to Hwy. 316, follows Hwy. 316 southeast to County Rd. 91, and then follows it south to E. 220th St. The southern boundary follows 220th St. west all the way to Farmington. The western boundary runs northwest around Farmington and then north along the border between Farmington and Empire Twp. to Rosemount, the starting point.

Access

The Dakota candidate search area is the closest to the Twin Cities. It is located just under 20 miles from downtown St. Paul and about 25 miles from downtown Minneapolis. Peak-hour travel time in 2010 would be about 35 to 40 minutes from downtown St. Paul and about 40 to 45 minutes from downtown Minneapolis. Among the three candidate areas, it is the closest to MSP airport. About 15 to 20 miles from MSP, the area's peak-hour travel time from MSP would be about 35 minutes.

Environment

As an active farming area, the Dakota candidate search area has few wetlands, except for the southwestern portion near tributaries of the Vermillion River. No lakes of substantial size exist within the area.The area has few biotic communities. The area is traversed by the Vermillion River, and the northern portions are close to the Mississippi and Lower St. Croix Rivers. The area contains the Bellwood State Game Refuge near its eastern border, and Spring Lake Park and the Hastings Wildlife Management Area are located just to the north of the area.

Advantages and disadvantages

Among the advantages of the Dakota candidate search area are its relative lack of wetlands and biotic communities, its flat topography, and limited environmental constraints east of Vermillion and in the Coates area. The area has generally low household density, and distances to Minneapolis and St. Paul downtowns are not too far. Additional access could be created by extending Cedar Av. The Pine Bend Refinery could serve as a buffer to an airport site. The area has several potential sites, offering flexibility.

Among the disadvantages is the presence of good farmland, some of which would be taken for airport use. The eastern portion of the search area is close to Hastings, close to the St. Croix and Mississippi Rivers. Access is limited to only one major north-south road, Hwy. 52, which would require upgrading. A road connection to I-35 probably would be needed. The area also includes the proposed Dakota County solid-waste resource recovery facility near Coates.

DAKOTA-SCOTT CANDIDATE SEARCH AREA

Location

The Dakota-Scott search area is located almost completely in Dakota County, but extends slightly into eastern Scott County (see *Fig. 3*). The search area is roughly 13 miles east and west, and 10 miles north and south. It covers approximately 113 square miles, or 72,000 acres. The area includes all or part of Eureka, Castle Rock, Greenvale, Waterford, Scotia and New Market Townships. The area is generally east of I-35, south of Lakeville and Farmington, west of Hampton and Randolph, and north of Northfield.

Starting at the area's northwest corner, the northern boundary begins at the intersection of I-35 and the Lakeville city limits. The northern boundary runs east, following the southern city limits of Lakeville and Farmington, and continues east along Hwy. 50 to the eastern boundary of Castle Rock Twp. The area's eastern boundary runs south along the eastern boundary of Castle Rock Twp. to W. 280th St. The southern boundary runs west along 280th St., then southwest following County Rd. 47 (Northfield Blvd.) to Hwy. 3, where it jogs north to County Rd. 96, which it follows west to the Dakota-Rice County line. The western boundary runs north along the Dakota-Rice County line to W. 280th St., where it jogs west briefly to I-35 and then continues north to the starting point at County Rd. 9 at Lakeville.

Access

The Dakota-Scott candidate search area is located just under 30 miles from both Minneapolis and St. Paul downtowns, providing equal access to both city centers. Peak-hour travel time from those city centers to the area would be about 50 to 55 minutes. The area is located about 25 miles from MSP, with a peak-hour travel time of about 40 minutes.

Environment

Another area of active farming, the Dakota-Scott candidate search area has portions with few wetlands and only a few lakes. The largest is Chub Lake. The Vermillion River traverses the northwestern section of the area and Chub Creek crosses the southern portion. None of the rivers within the area are prone to flooding. Few biotic communities are located in the area, although the Carlton College State Game Refuge is located just to the south.

Advantages and disadvantages

Among the advantages of the Dakota-Scott candidate search area are its relative lack of biotic communities and few wetlands in its eastern portion. The area has good access from several roads, especially I-35, which forms its western boundary. The area is equidistant from Minneapolis and St. Paul downtowns. The area has low housing density and flight patterns would be able to avoid the developed and developing portions of the region. Good potential for sites exists in the search area.

Disadvantages include the wetlands and hilly areas that increase in number in the western portion of the area. The area is relatively distant from Metro Area population centers, particularly the

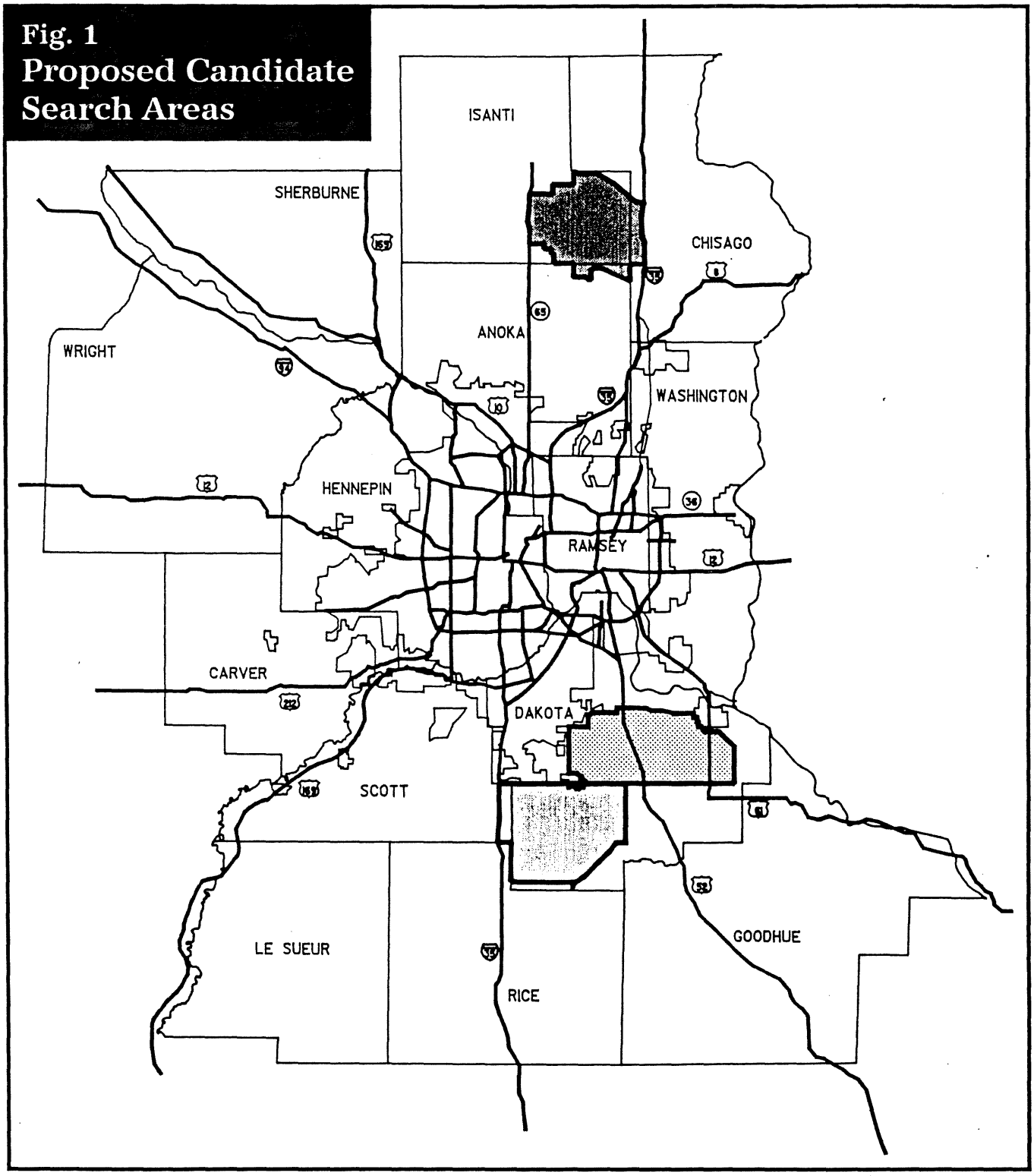
candidate area's southern and southwestern portions.

THE NEXT STEPS

The New Airport Search Area Advisory Task Force will formally recommend candidate search areas to the Metropolitan Council in the Council Chambers on Dec. 21, at 10 a.m. On Jan. 8, 1991, the Council's Metropolitan Systems Committee will discuss task force recommendations in the Council Chambers at 10:30 a.m., and will hear public reaction to the three proposed candidate search areas. On Jan. 10, the Council is expected to adopt the candidate search areas for further study. Adoption of the areas will also serve to put into effect general land use controls intended to protect the candidate search areas from land uses incompatible with an airport. The legislature has given the Council authority to apply the controls only to search areas within the seven-county Metro Area until 1997. The Council also can enter into joint agreements with counties outside the Metro Area.

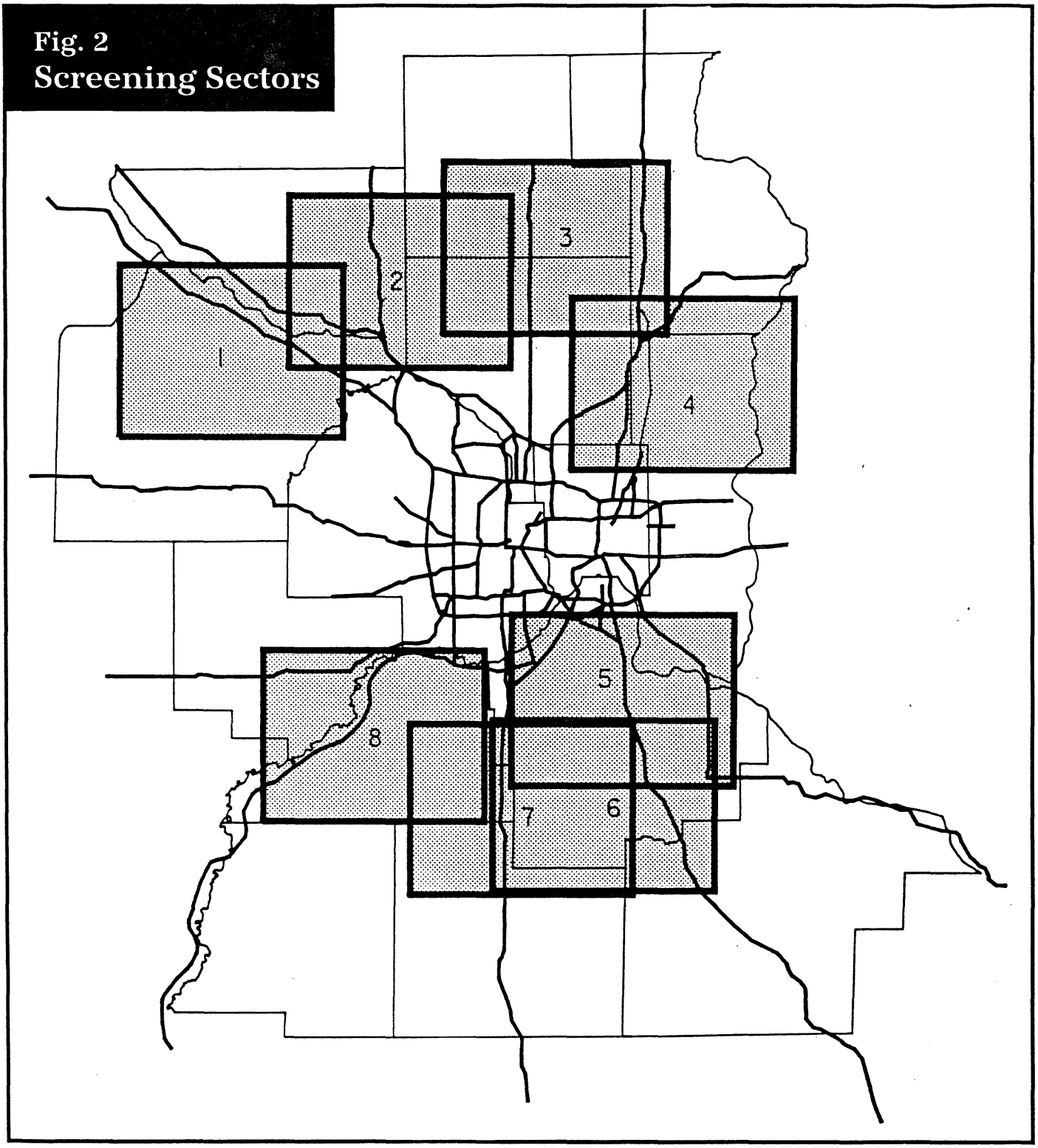
The Council is producing a more detailed report on the information in this summary. The report, *Selecting a Search Area for a New Major Airport; Part One: Three Candidate Areas*, will be available after Jan. 25, 1991. To obtain a copy of the report, Pub. No. 559-91-004, at no cost, call the Council's Data Center at 291-8140.

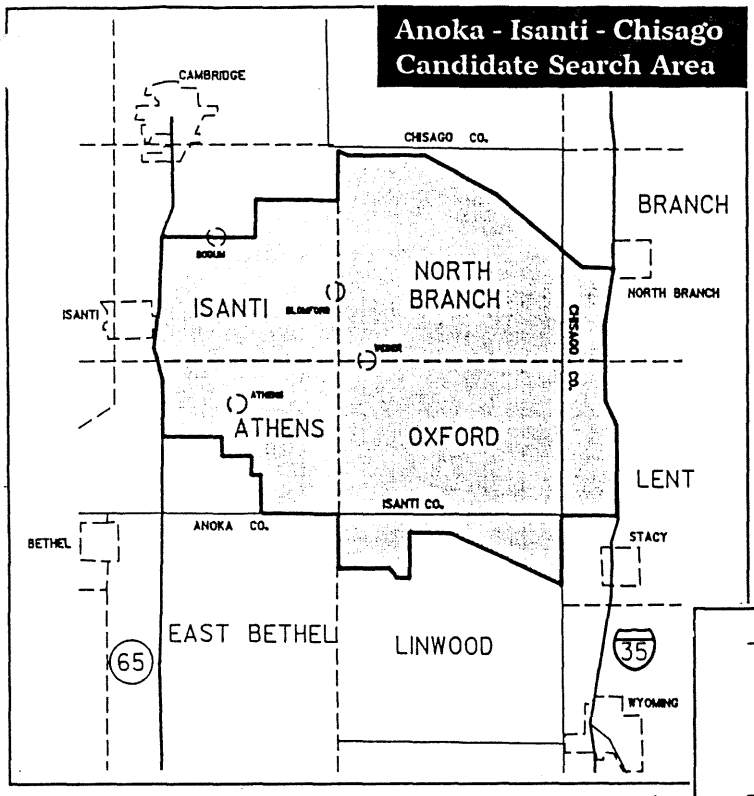
Fig. 1
Proposed Candidate Search Areas

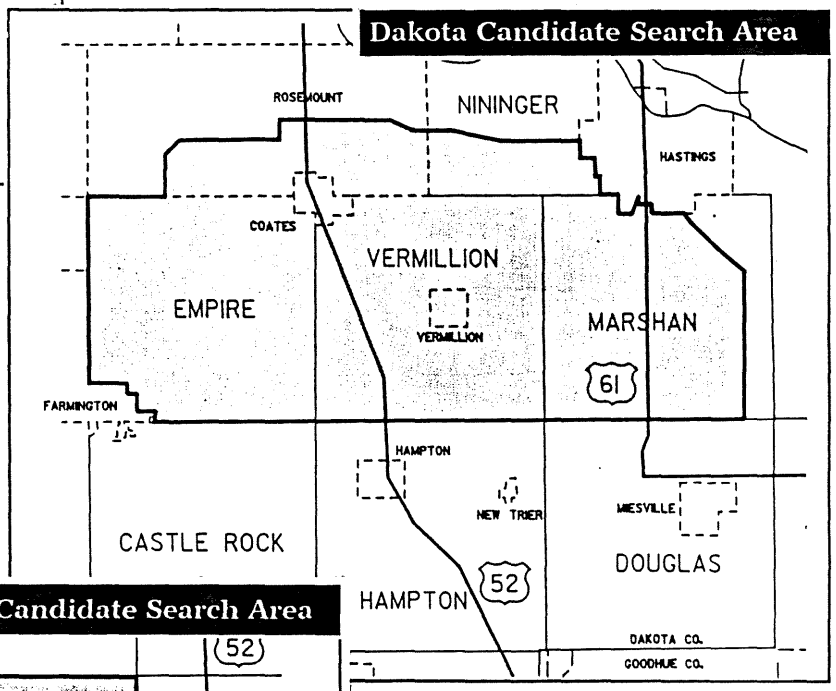


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Fig. 2
Screening Sectors







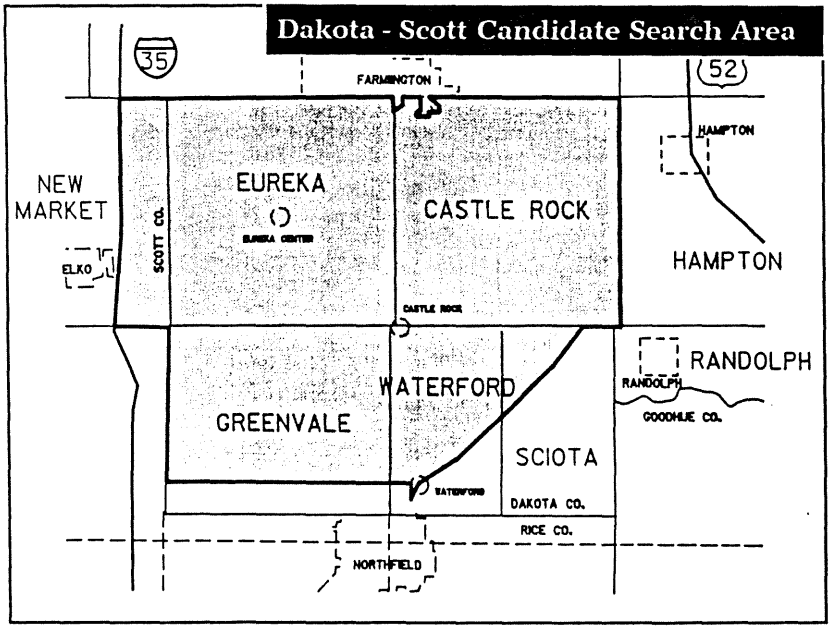


Fig. 3
Closer View of Three Proposed Candidate Search Areas