



Executive Constantine launches King County Aerospace Alliance

By [Tiffany Elliott](#), Seattle Technology Examiner

RENTON, Wash. - King County Executive Dow Constantine joined with the leaders of business, labor, education, and several local governments on the morning of Oct. 19 to launch a new regional effort to strengthen the local aerospace industry, and help position the county as the prime location to build the re-engined [Boeing 737 MAX](#).

“The factories are here. The workforce is here. The ability to move goods is here...nowhere in the region do the air, land and sea transportation facilities tie together as they do in the Duwamish Valley,” Constantine said.

“Now we must act to secure our future as the leader in this vital and still-growing sector. I am committed to working shoulder-to-shoulder with this group to build aerospace and keep the industry in King County.”

The Alliance is part of a statewide campaign, spearheaded by Gov. Chris Gregoire and industry partners, to manufacture the next generation of 737’s in Washington.

Constantine’s approach is three-pronged; training the next generation of aviation builders, identifying land for industrial expansion, and making it easier to do business across jurisdictions.

It brings together four cities, the Seattle Port, three Chambers of Commerce, two colleges, workforce, and two labor unions.

The City of Renton is one of these. Mayor Denis Law noted that Boeings first commercial jet, the 707, was built not so long ago, in his city.

“Renton has been proud to support aviation innovation and excellence as the home of The Boeing Company for seventy years,” he said.

“The impact of this plant stretches throughout King County and beyond. We must work together to support Boeing, its suppliers and the aerospace industry as a whole, and continue to demonstrate that this is the best place in the world to build the 737 MAX.”

Mayor Law’s comments are the reflection of an unlikely [yet very welcome] alliance with a single, unifying goal: to create the next generation’s aerospace industry of King County, one that will be felt in every corner of Washington State.

Tayloe Washburn, the head of Governor Gregoire’s [Project Pegasus](#) launched earlier this year, said, “If you think about it, our entire state is really one giant factory floor. And our competition isn’t within the state, but it’s with other nations and other states that are eager to develop their own aerospace industry.”

Julia Patterson, the King County Council’s Budget Chairperson agreed, “We can’t take Boeing or the aerospace industry for granted. The success of this initiative will directly impact King County and our budget. By creating more aerospace jobs, sales tax revenues from those employees will help support the County’s ability to fund services that keep our communities safe.”

The news conference, in the parking lot of the Renton Chamber of Commerce office was just above the tarmac of the Renton Airport, a still-sunny morning with a slight breeze that ruffled jackets.

As if to emphasize this, at one point during Patterson's speech, a massive airplane engine below roared to life, drowning out her words. Then, after the engine died down, a helicopter flew past.

"Can you still hear me?" Patterson joked.

"Normally around here, we become annoyed by the sound of jet engines," Constantine said, pointing to the airplanes behind him. "But that is the sound of family-wage jobs."

"Great companies [like Boeing] need great workers with the right skills," said Marlena Sessions, CEO of the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County.

"We [the workforce development system of King County] are already capable and competitive, but we must step up and expand capacity and increase the number of skilled workers ready to go to work now, and train the next generation of aviation employees for the future."

And the need couldn't come sooner, it was mentioned that the average age of a Boeing employee today is forty-eight.

"And these aren't just good jobs," Sessions added. "These are great jobs."

If anything, the King County Aerospace Alliance has already succeeded in accomplishing the impossible, uniting business and labor.

"We worked on identifying a shared agenda for our mutual economic prosperity, and looking into aerospace is really a no-brainer," said Eric Shinfeld, Director of the Seattle Chamber Federal Policy.

Dave Freiboth, standing next to Shinfeld, agreed.

"Labor supports the coalition work that will keep aerospace work in Washington and King County," the executive secretary of the Martin Luther King County Labor Council said.

"We have a strong working relationship with our coalition partners from business, education and government, and will work hard in support of collaborative efforts to keep middle-class jobs in our community."

In a world that has become more divided than united, this simple gesture was breath of fresh air. It was correctly stated that, although there are fundamental areas in which business and labor will always disagree on [as we all do from time to time], we can genuinely unite behind a worthy cause.

"In the last century, no other industry has done more to create jobs for the middle-class workers than the aerospace industry," Constantine closed. "Jobs with benefits, a community that believes in, and honored the middle-class, that's what we must secure for the economic recovery of this region."

Although the announcement was a critical step, it is only one of many. The Metropolitan King County Council is set to consider the proposal at its next Committee of the Whole meeting on Monday, Oct. 24.



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