

Briefings

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State's first new airport in almost 20 years coming to Karlstad



The Moose Capital of the North is gaining another title: Home of the First New Minnesota Airport in Almost 20 Years.

The community of Karlstad, nestled 35 miles south of the US–Canadian border in the northwest corner of Minnesota, will still celebrate Moosefest each year. And don't expect the bull moose silhouette on the town's water tower to be replaced by an airplane any time soon. The town's newest distinction, though, comes after years of planning and is expected to make a major impact on its 760 residents and the surrounding area.

"Karlstad's community and businesses will really benefit from a new airport," says Al Lundeen, chair of the airport board. "We're excited about the increased job opportunities, economic development, and overall growth this will bring to the area."

The City of Karlstad owns and operates the current Karlstad Municipal Airport, which was established in the mid-1950s and has a 2,606-ft. turf runway. The existing airport has struggled to meet the area's aviation needs, in large part due to the runway's seasonal sogginess as well as obstructions to navigation.

"The existing airport has several limitations for business use and growth, and it doesn't support emergency medical services or firefighting either," says Angela Holm, head of the aviation division at Bollig Engineering. Those issues have sent many crucial users to other regional

airports over the decades. As a thriving community experiencing population and industry growth, the city knew something needed to be done, so the airport board began exploring options.

Improvements to the current location were ruled out as cost-prohibitive because of the runway's condition, its inability to be lengthened, and obstructions in the approach and departure paths. With that decided, focus shifted to the possibility of relocating.

Prior to the planning of a new airport, MnDOT Aeronautics and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) conducted extensive research into the current and future needs of the northwest region of Minnesota. Since 2017, the City of Karlstad and Bollig Engineering have worked together to summarize those findings, survey local businesses, and determine how to best serve the needs of Karlstad, the region, and the Minnesota State Aviation System.

No public hangars are available at the existing airport, and three aircraft are based

airport. The survey also confirmed that several additional aircraft owners would base their aircraft at the new Karlstad airport.

Beyond the benefits to recreational pilots, a new airport will provide better access to medical services, firefighting accessibility, and more convenient and agile business mobility. In particular, the business opportunities garnered attention during the research phase, as DEED projects that the northwest region of Minnesota will see a 4.2 percent increase in employment levels over the next decade. Research uncovered several businesses in the region interested in basing their aircraft at the new Karlstad airport.

Three prominent businesses—Mattracks Inc., Wikstrom Telephone Company, and GreenWay Environmental-Hydrovac—emphasized that expanded economic opportunities would be available to their businesses with new airport facilities. Mattracks is the world's largest rubber track conversion manufacturer, selling to customers in 140 countries. It currently owns four aircraft, mostly based at other



Rendering of the new Karlstad airport

in two privately owned hangars. Local pilots were surveyed and responded enthusiastically that they would increase their operations at Karlstad with an improved

locations because of the lack of adequate facilities at the current Karlstad airport. Wikstrom Telephone is a large employer

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in the area and uses aircraft for consulting work. GreenWay Environmental provides services throughout the United States and uses aircraft for more efficient, convenient response and mobility.

MnDOT's Airport Economic Impact Calculator estimates that having three business tenants at the Karlstad airport would increase annual economic activity by \$1.9 million. In addition to expanded business opportunities, access to medical services will become more important as Kittson County, where Karlstad is located, is expecting its 65-and-older population to increase by approximately 40 percent over the next decade.

With all these factors at play, the City of Karlstad partnered with Bollig Engineering to conduct an airport feasibility report and site selection study funded by MnDOT. Based on the outcome, the city determined

that a new airport would benefit local stakeholders well into the future.

The Minnesota Legislature, recognizing that the current airport was not conducive to supporting growth in the region, dedicated \$5.6 million for the construction of a new airport in the transportation budget passed in late June 2021.

The new airport will be located less than two miles southeast of the city and will initially include a paved 4,000 ft. x 75 ft. lighted runway, an apron with 10 tiedowns, an AWOS, and a beacon. The future phases of the project will include lengthening the runway to 4,700 ft. x 100 ft. and adding fuel services, a parallel taxiway, an arrivals/departures building, a precision approach, and hangars to support multiple aircraft.

According to MnDOT's economic impact calculator, airport construction alone will create 76 full-time direct and indirect jobs. The City of Karlstad believes the job numbers could be even higher.

"We're really proud of the group effort our local leaders, state lawmakers, and the Bollig team put into making this project a reality," Lundeen says. "This project is part of a bright future for Karlstad and we're grateful it's moving forward."

Bollig Engineering is currently working on the initial phases of the project, which include environmental assessment, geotechnical testing, surveying, and preliminary design. Results of those efforts will inform the next steps, which include land acquisition and final design.

The anticipated completion date of the Karlstad airport is fall of 2024 or spring of 2025. As work begins, survey crews have been advised to be on the lookout for wildlife, but it's not the town's beloved moose they'll watch for. Karlstad is also home to bears, although—thankfully—none have shown an interest in aviation yet.

—Angela Olson is a project coordinator/aviation planner with Bollig Inc.

Five ways to educate and engage your airport's project decision makers



You've met with airport tenants and the airport board. You've updated your airport Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and finished the airport layout plan. You've had initial discussions with MnDOT and the FAA. Your airport project is ready to go!

That is, until you attend a city council or county board meeting only to learn that local funding for your project isn't approved. What can you do? What's the next step to make sure you don't lose all the hard work and progress put into your project?

Although many general aviation (GA) airport managers have a consultant to help with the specific federal and state require-

ments for funding, there is still that essential piece of the puzzle to move airport projects forward: support from city council or county board members. Following are five ideas for how airport managers can educate and engage decision makers on what it takes to maintain a safe airport facility, continue to provide needed growth opportunities, and ultimately help secure critical funding.

1) Host an open house at the airport and provide a tour

Most city council and county board members have never been to their local airport, yet their decisions are vital to the local airport's funding and future. Hosting an open house and providing a detailed tour of your airport is a great way to educate and engage decision makers. These events allow your council or board members to put their feet on the runway and drive down the taxiway, which can give them a sense of ownership of the proposed projects. During the tour, point out the hangar owners and based aircraft that are paying fees to store aircraft at the airport, the fuel system producing

revenue for operating expenses, or the navigational aids used by pilots to access the runway.

Tours also give members an opportunity to think of ways the community could use the airport and earn revenue for operating expenses, such as renting conference rooms to the public for community meetings or social gatherings.

2) Hold an annual CIP meeting prior to local budget deadlines

The FAA and MnDOT Office of Aeronautics require airport sponsors to provide a CIP that documents project and maintenance needs for the next 20 years at the airport. In fact, if a project isn't included in an airport's CIP, it will not be considered for federal or state funding.

The FAA and MnDOT ask that the CIP include realistic projects for the first three years. This ensures the airport sponsor has the local share of the project funding available before MnDOT and the FAA secure funding for a project. If the local funding

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AirTAP was developed through the joint efforts of the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the Minnesota Council of Airports, and the Center for Transportation Studies (CTS). AirTAP is housed within CTS at:

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share is unavailable, the project may need to be shifted to a later date. Brainstorming project needs and the local budget can benefit the city council or county board members and give airport staff a realistic understanding of funding availability. Collaboration and communication are critical to helping council or board members understand project timing and funding needs prior to local funding requests.

3) Conduct an "Airport 101" educational session

A significant amount of infrastructure and pavement is used in airport operations, along with airspace and navigational aids—all of which need to be kept in good working condition. Decision makers must be aware of operational needs at a local level so they can help with critical future processes and make more informed decisions.

GA airport managers are often city administrators or public works directors who have the airport under their umbrella of responsibilities. What they've learned along the way can also benefit their council and board members. Holding Airport 101 education sessions provides an opportunity to:

- Share knowledge specific to the regulations and requirements for an airport sponsor.
- Share the type of funding available, including federal and state grants.
- Discuss the airport's 20-year master plan

and airport layout plan.

- Clearly lay out the complex requirements that need to be met to receive state and federal funding.

4) Review the community residents and businesses who use the airport

The presence of a local airport can attract businesses to a community—for flying staff to business meetings as well as flying goods. City council or county board members may not know the local manufacturing company or retail stores that are using the airport for business travel. Introducing community members to council or board members can provide the background and information needed to continue to gain their support.

Further, local airports are often used in emergency situations. Many medical operators use the airport for patient or donor transports. An ambulance can meet a medical helicopter or aircraft at the airport to provide transportation to or from the local hospital.

Communicating about how businesses and medical operators rely on the airport is a way to emphasize how the local community benefits from maintaining the facility.

A local airport provides jobs to residents, brings in goods and services, and attracts business outside of aviation. The MnDOT Office of Aeronautics' economic impact calculator (dot.state.mn.us/airport-economic-study) can document this economic impact and is a helpful tool to gain insight and communicate the benefits with decision makers.

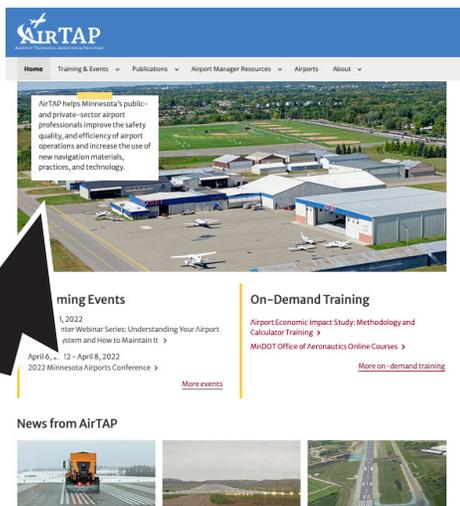
5) Host a pancake breakfast or community event at the airport

Hosting a social event such as a pancake breakfast can be a great way to showcase your airport and bring people out who might otherwise not have a reason to visit it. For these events, the airport sponsor usually teams up with local community groups, which provide the labor and supplies. The events might be a way for a community group to raise money for its organization, which in turn may make the airport a more inviting place for group members and encourage them to share their love of aviation with the broader community.

Events can also attract the next generation of aviation enthusiasts, providing them with an opportunity to see what the field is all about and the type of careers available to them. Young attendees can also gain hands-on experience with aircraft and see what an airport looks like up-close.

Moving an airport project from planning to construction takes support from many people. Education and engagement are key to garnering local support for your airport and airport projects—and the best way to build that support and rapport is by building relationships with the people in your community.

—Melissa Underwood is a senior aviation planner with SEH. Fillmore County Airport manager Pam Schroeder also contributed to this article.



AirTAP website has a new look!

Have you visited the AirTAP website recently? If so, you've seen our updated design and features to make it easier to find what you're looking for, whether event details,

training information, publications, or other resources to help you do your job. Check it out at airtap.umn.edu.

Airport geometry justification a topic at this year's conference

Changing regulations, limited funding, and high demand mean airport sponsors need to justify their airport's existing infrastructure in order to receive federal funding for critical maintenance—especially pavements, which are the most safety-critical infrastructure to maintain. Understanding how to evaluate a runway's needs and apply strategic principles to maintain pavement areas is often complex and difficult.

To provide airports with a road map, a panel of airport engineers and planners from SEH Inc. will be digging deep into this topic at the 2022 Minnesota Airports Conference. Panelists will share definitions, case

Mark your calendar!

April 5: PFAS Forum

April 6-8: 2022 Minnesota Airports Conference

May 12: AirTAP Wildlife Hazard Control Workshop

Details at airtap.umn.edu/events

studies, critical steps, and keys to success for evaluating pavement needs and applying for federal funding.

Over the years, the amount of pavement that needs maintenance work has surpassed the funding available. Come and learn how to justify your project needs and ensure you continue to receive funding for the valuable infrastructure at your airport!

—Melissa Underwood

MnDOT updates

Staffing

- Jessica McBroom was recently hired as a grants specialist. She will assist with grants programs within Airport Development and serve as the primary MnDOT contact for ARPA.

Deadlines

- CRRSAA/ARPA Grant Programs: Airports should continue to submit CRRSAA invoices to Crystal Nickles (Crystal.Nickles@state.mn.us) or ARPA invoices to Jessica McBroom (Jessica.Mcbroom@state.mn.us).
- The deadline to add state-only grant requests for FY23 to the CIP is January 31. Reminder: Any requests that were not offered last fiscal year need to be manually moved forward by the sponsor to be considered for the following fiscal year.
- The final deadline for submitting FY21 M&O is Feb. 1. There must be a fully executed amendment for an extension of time to be eligible for reimbursement (expenses can be incurred up through Dec. 31, 2021). For sponsors who received a CARES grant, CARES funding must be exhausted before M&O can be requested.

FAA updates

Deadlines

- Please see the following web page for the FY22 FRN for AIP Entitlements issued via the Federal Register on Dec. 21, 2021: [federalregister.gov/documents/2021/12/21/2021-27533/deadline-for-notification-of-intent-to-use-the-airport-improvement-program-air-primary-cargo-and](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/12/21/2021-27533/deadline-for-notification-of-intent-to-use-the-airport-improvement-program-air-primary-cargo-and). There are important dates for your entitlement-only grants—especially ones that are pending environmental or land acquisition.
- An airport sponsor intending to apply for any of its available entitlement funds, including those unused but still available in accordance with 49 U.S.C. 47117 from prior years, must notify the FAA of its intent to submit a grant application by 12 p.m. prevailing local time Feb. 15, 2022.
- The final grant application deadline for entitlement funds only is April 11, 2022. The final grant application funding requests should be based on bids, not estimates.
- As prescribed under 49 U.S.C. 47117, the FAA will carry over the remainder of available entitlement funds after June 1, 2022. These funds will not be available again until the beginning of FY23.

Staffing

- Lindsay Butler was promoted to the Dakota-Minnesota Airports District Office (ADO) manager, previously having served as the deputy manager.
- Josh Fitzpatrick, environmental specialist, accepted a position within the HQ-DC office and is no longer with the ADO.
- Sandy DePottey, program manager/planner, retired Dec. 31, 2021.

New policies and regulations

On Dec. 16, 2021, the FAA provided a breakdown of the FY22 airport allocation designated to each airport under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law—Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (BIL). If you haven't already visited the website, you should! [faa.gov/bil/airport-infrastructure](https://www.faa.gov/bil/airport-infrastructure).

The BIL provides \$15 billion over 5 years for airport-related projects as defined under the existing Airport Improvement Grant and Passenger Facility Charge criteria. The money can be invested in runways, taxiways, safety and sustainability projects, terminals, airport-transit connections, and roadway projects.

Under the law, Minnesota airports could receive approximately \$298 million for infrastructure development over 5 years.

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