

DeKalb County Airport History

Past and Present Airport Development

The DeKalb County Airport was originally constructed in 1964 to replace the old Auburn airport. Construction of the airport was as a joint effort by DeKalb County, the City of Auburn and the private firm of Auburn Airways, Inc. The terminal building and a paved 3,650-foot long east-west runway were built in 1964 and hangars were built from 1964-1966. Also constructed in 1964 but later abandoned was a north-south turf landing strip of undetermined length (estimated to be less than 2,000'). The airport developed a master plan in the mid-1970's that incorporated a Capital Improvements Plan, no new construction or facility expansion occurred at the airport throughout the 1970's and early 1980's. The first real step in developing the airport occurred in 1983 when the County purchased additional land immediately east of the airport to allow for future a runway extension. Subsequent federal grants for land acquisition, the closing of a portion of County Road 27 and the construction of a new portion of County Road 62 laid further foundation for eventual extension of the runway.

Throughout the 1990's the DeKalb County Board of Aviation took an increasingly more active role in the development of the airport. In the mid 1990's the runway was extended to 5,000 feet and widened to 100 feet and a full-length, 35-foot wide parallel taxiway was added. A new terminal building, maintenance hangar, a 10,000 square-yard terminal apron and a 12,000-gallon Jet A and 100LL fuel farm were constructed shortly thereafter. The period from 2000 to mid-2003 saw additional improvements such as the installation of a taxiway lighting system, improvements to the fuel farm, the construction of the first new T-hangar building in nearly 40 years and the relocation of a power line that would obstruct the planned Instrument Landing System (ILS).

Projects in progress in mid-2003 include the construction of a second new T-hangar building, site preparation and wetland mitigation efforts to support the installation of the ILS, the installation of an Automated Weather Observation System (AWOS) and preparation for the construction of another corporate hangar by private investors. The County is also currently acquiring land needed for future capital improvements. The County is positioned to expand the existing 376± acres of airport lands by purchasing an additional 266± acres as detailed in their recently adopted 20-year plan. The land acquisitions will allow for the installation of the ILS in late 2003/early 2004 and future lengthening of the primary runway by as much as 2,000'. Additionally the land acquisitions will provide the property needed to allow for future construction of a crosswind runway if/when appropriate.

Future Development Plans

The airport's 20-year plan adopted in 2001 includes an aggressive Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) divided into three phases. Phase I covers the first five years, Phase II covers the second five years and Phase III covers the final ten years. The County's progressive approach toward airport development can be noted from the fact that while the airport is only in the third year of Phase I of the CIP it has either completed or is in the process of completing nearly all of the planned projects for Phase I such as acquiring property east of the airport needed for ILS construction, re-routing a power line

obstructing the ILS path, installing the ILS and the AWOS, completing T-hangar site preparation and constructing the first two of five planned T-hangars. Although the airport is still in the time period covered by Phase I of the CIP, certain land acquisition requirements from Phases II and III are also either complete or in progress or, in one instance, an option secured for the property in question. Phase II of the CIP includes projects such as burying a major power transmission line and relocating a portion of County Road 29 in preparation for a runway extension, strengthening runway 9-27 and widening it to 150', strengthening the north parallel taxiway and widening it to 60', adding a partial south parallel taxiway to allow for facilities to be located on the south side of the airport, expanding the general aviation apron by an additional 10,000 square yards and adding additional corporate hangars and T-hangars. Phase III of the CIP covers projects such as extending runway 9-27 by up to 2000', extending the north parallel taxiway to match the extended runway length, constructing the 4,000' x 75' crosswind runway 5-23 and adding additional corporate hangars and T-hangars.

Economic Impact of Airport Development

The public investment in the airport that occurred in the 1990's was accompanied and enhanced by private investment. This private investment demonstrated the effectiveness and benefits of the capital improvements occurring due to the investment of federal, state and local funds. The Rieke Corporation built the first corporate hangar at the airfield in 1990-91 and the Auburn Foundry built the second corporate hangar in 1994. Small corporate aircraft had been already based at the airport for several years however in many cases they were often nothing more than single-engine piston aircraft used for commercial rather than recreational purposes. The construction of corporate hangars and the basing of more capable corporate aircraft at the airport is a testament to the role the airport could play in support of the economic development of DeKalb County. According to the Aviation Association of Indiana's biennial study "Economic Impact of Airports in Indiana" the DeKalb County Municipal Airport had a total annual economic impact to the community of \$7.8 million in 1999, increasing to \$10.3 million in 2001. It is anticipated that the economic impact will again increase upon completion of the installation of the ILS and the AWOS. It is likely the economic impact will further increase upon the completion of the planned lengthening project for runway 9-27.

Note: The above document was prepared for the Aviation Association of Indiana in order to provide them with some historical data on the DeKalb County Airport. They have requested this information as part of their research for the Centennial of Flight celebration. The history above is only intended to be a very brief history of the airport and needs to be expanded at some future date.

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July 2003