



- Courtesy Photo

Big plans for Grand Junction's airport

New buildings & increased service promotes economic growth

MAY, 31 2012

CAITLIN ROW

CROW@GJFREEPRESS.COM

Already the largest commercial travel hub on the Western Slope, Grand Junction Regional Airport has big plans for growth. A new terminal, improved runways and a separate administrative building are just a few projects in the pipeline. And, increased service means continued benefits for local and regional businesses.

The next big project is reconstruction of the airport's 30-year-old terminal building, starting with a separate administrative structure, GJ Regional Airport administrative deputy director Amy Jordan said.

"The terminal expansion project is really important for the look and feel of the airport," Jordan said. "We've already rebuilt the roadway and the parking lot."

WHY REBUILD?

According to Jordan, an airport study recently determined its passenger building needs \$4.3 million in upgrades and repairs, with another \$1.2 million to correct code and compliance issues.

"It's more efficient to rebuild the passenger terminal facilities instead of trying to maintain it," Jordan said. "We're designing (the new administration building) right now."

Jordan said constructing an administrative building first will allow business to carry on as usual while the passenger facility is redone. The 24,000-square-foot, three-floor structure will house airport administrative functions as well as a rescue and fire-fighting station. A public community room will be built as well. Construction will likely start by early next year, and it will go in just east of the current passenger facility.

Costs for the whole project are still being determined, Jordan said, and a timeline for the main passenger facility isn't in place. Other pending projects include upgrades to airport runways, gates and aircraft facilities.

Jordan additionally said the airport is doing an environmental assessment for reconstruction of Runway 1129.

"The project will be phased over 10 years," Jordan said. "We'll likely start construction next year with dirt work."

GJ's current runways were built in the 1950s, Jordan said, and it's a "hodgepodge of different materials now." To continue regional service and keep costs down, construction will shift the runway 650 feet north of its current location. Shifting it north also allows for both runways to operate at night.

"Within the next few years, we'll have to relocate 27 1/4 Road west to accommodate the runway," Jordan said. "During construction, the road will stay open the whole time."

DIRECT FLIGHTS TO GJ INCREASE

While travelers using GJ Regional Airport support local tourism, the airport also increases access to other Western Slope gems like Gateway Canyons Resort and even Telluride.

A 2008 Colorado Economic Impact Study conducted by the Colorado Department of Transportation noted that "in

periods of bad weather, Grand Junction Regional Airport is sometimes the only airport that is accessible in all of western Colorado.”

“Access is key in destination marketing, and we certainly have it with our wonderful air service,” Grand Junction Visitor & Convention Bureau division manager Barbara Bowman said. “While other destinations in our region are losing air service, Grand Junction Regional Airport continues to ... add air service, which is such a benefit to the community. Many people don't realize that we have the third busiest airport in Colorado.”

And the hub just gets busier — direct service to Houston on United/Continental started in May 2011. SkyWest Airlines, a regional partner of Delta Airlines, will additionally expand services June 7 between GJ and Salt Lake City, Utah. Over the past six years, other direct flights were added locally — to Las Vegas, Los Angeles, and to Dallas/Fort Worth. GJ currently offers nonstop flights to seven cities.

And, it's a good thing flights continue to increase, Bowman said.

“Any cut in air service could certainly have a negative effect on both business travel and tourism coming into GJ,” she said. “Business travel is a very important market segment to the local lodging properties, as is leisure tourism.”

AIRPORTS & COLORADO

Bowman also said the GJVCB is a huge supporter of Colorado airport growth in general.

“With two new direct flights announced to Denver — Icelandair and United Airlines to Tokyo, this gives Colorado and even Grand Junction the ability to tap into new international markets,” Bowman said.

International guests tend to stay longer, Bowman said — typically between 17-21 days, and they spend more money while on vacation.

“This partnership holds so much potential for our state and city,” she said.

Additionally, increasing flights to remote Western Slope destinations have a huge economic benefit, Telluride Montrose Regional Air Organization (TMRAO) executive director Scott Stewart said.

“For us, being in a relatively remote part of the state and the country, access to the region via air service is critical to local businesses and residents having access to the national transportation system,” Stewart said. “(It's also important for) the rest of the country, and for visitors and tourists to conveniently get to the many natural wonders we have in our backyard.”

http://www.gjfreepress.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20120601/COMMUNITY_NEWS/120539970/1001&parentprofile=1059&template=printart