

<http://tribunecontentagency.com>



## Eastern Iowa Airport on pace to have second busiest year in its 75 year history

Izabela Zaluska - The Gazette, Cedar Rapids, Iowa (TNS)

APR 28, 2022

Apr. 28—Municipal Airport photo from April 28, 1947 — a day after the first commercial flight took place at the Cedar Rapids Municipal airport, which is now known as The Eastern Iowa Airport. (Clipping from The Gazette)

Gazette archive of coverage from April 28, 1947 — a day after the first commercial flight took place at the Cedar Rapids Municipal airport, which is now known as The Eastern Iowa Airport.

CEDAR RAPIDS — The Eastern Iowa Airport — which is on track to have 2022 be the second-busiest year in its history — is looking toward the future as it prepares to wrap up its terminal modernization project that includes adding space and gates.

As workforce and other national challenges continue to impact airports, Director Marty Lenss said it's time to redefine travel as well as help address workforce retention and recruitment. The airport will partner with Kirkwood Community College on a new aviation maintenance program launching in fall 2023.

"We must — and I stress must — begin to work and think differently within our region," Lenss said to over 200 attendees at the "State of Your Airport" event Thursday in Cedar Rapids.

### Advertisement

Millions in federal pandemic relief funding will help the airport cross the "finish line" on its terminal upgrade project, Lenss said. The Eastern Iowa Airport is eligible for \$28.3 million in funds.

Gov. Kim Reynolds last month announced the \$100 million in funding available for Iowa's eight commercial airports. The funds, which are being administered by the Iowa Department of Transportation, are from the American Rescue Plan passed in 2021 by Congress and signed into law by President Joe Biden.

Iowa's funds are distributed largely in proportion to the amount of air travel at each airport. Funds will be awarded on June 1, according to the Iowa DOT.

The Eastern Iowa Airport has invested about \$53 million in the terminal upgrade project, which began in 2014. Phase three wrapped up in 2020 just as the pandemic started, and the project has been on hold due to COVID-19, Lenss said.

The final phase has been projected to cost another \$50 million. Ongoing upgrades will include expanded space, additional jet bridges, more concessions and amenities and a continued transition to a geothermal ventilation system.

The improvements are scheduled to begin in spring 2023, The Gazette previously reported. Lenss said the construction timeline is about 18 to 24 months.

Travel rebounding

Business News Newsletter Signup

Newsletter Signup

Delivered to your inbox weekdays

Email

Please wait...

Sign Up

40

mailerlite\_subscribe\_form

08863de653

Thank you for joining us!

You will begin to receive our Daily Business News updates. Add [newsletters@thegazette.com](mailto:newsletters@thegazette.com) to your contacts.

After a sharp decrease in total passengers in 2020, travel numbers at the airport have since increased. It has seen an uptick in passengers, returning close to pre-pandemic numbers.

The total number of passengers from 2020 to 2021 increased nearly 72 percent — 615,935 in 2020 to 1,058,726 in 2021. The total number of passengers in 2019 — the airport's busiest year in its history — was 1,342,736.

Lenss said 2022 is on pace to be the second-busiest ever.

The Eastern Iowa Airport is well-positioned as the aviation industry changes, said William Swelbar, chief industry analyst at the Swelbar-Zhong Consultancy, a commercial aviation economic analysis and research firm.

The reality for many airports across the country "that are not CID" — code for The Eastern Iowa Airport — Swelbar said, is that they will struggle going forward. The industry is headed in the direction of closing small airports, Swelbar said. A pilot shortage and larger airports having more opportunity to generate revenue are among the reasons, he said.

Lenss "has recognized the train has been coming for the last decade, and he has positioned CID very nicely to be able to take advantage of a marketplace that is sure to change," Swelbar said.

Kirkwood partnership

The Eastern Iowa Airport also is working to tackle "one of the region's and state's biggest challenges" — workforce recruitment and retention, Lenss said.

Lenss announced the airport will be partnering with Kirkwood Community College on an aviation maintenance program. The Aircraft and Powerplant Technician Program is expected to launch with its first class in fall 2023.

The need for such a program "is substantial," Kirkwood President Lori Sundberg said in a video played at the event. It will help meet needs of the community and provide jobs for residents.

There are 90 annual job openings in Iowa for aircraft and powerplant technicians, according to the airport. The jobs pay from \$18 to \$35 per hour.

"This will benefit the Corridor and the state of Iowa in lots of ways," Sundberg said. " ... We need mechanics across the state, across the nation."

### Celebrating 75 years

Cedar Rapids Mayor Tiffany O'Donnell acknowledged the city's "tremendously rich history" during her remarks. Thursday's event also marked 75 years of commercial air service at the airport.

The first commercial flight took place on April 27, 1947, with 20,000 people watching the flight arrive.

"Could folks have envisioned where we're at today?" Lenss asked, adding how leadership and work from the past laid the ground for the airport's future. The airport is a "vital economic engine," Lenss said, and it is more than just air service.

Businesses want to go where they can make money and have a good quality of life, such as Iowa, said Michael Boyd, president and chief executive officer of Boyd Group International, a Colorado-based aviation forecasting and consulting firm.

Megan Alter, Iowa City's mayor pro tem, called the airport a "true regional hub" vital to business retention and recruitment.

O'Donnell added, "As the mayor, I have the privilege of meeting potential companies who want to make Cedar Rapids and the Corridor home, and I'm so glad we have this be their first and last impression."

Comments: (319) 339-3155; [izabela.zaluska@thegazette.com](mailto:izabela.zaluska@thegazette.com)

---

(c)2022 The Gazette (Cedar Rapids, Iowa)

Visit The Gazette (Cedar Rapids, Iowa) at [thegazette.com](http://thegazette.com)

Distributed by [Tribune Content Agency, LLC](http://TribuneContentAgency.com).

Copyright 2022 Tribune Content Agency.