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FAA Launches Study of General Aviation Airports

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The FAA is taking a top-down look at the current general aviation airport system in the U.S. to better describe and explain the many roles and functions these airports serve in their respective communities. The review, which began last fall, is focusing on infrastructure needs, based on the roles and functions of the airports.

In recent years, the FAA has conducted two studies to look at capacity and development needs at commercial service airports, and now the agency is turning its attention to general aviation airports.

There are 2,950 nonprimary airports included in the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS), including nonprimary commercial service, reliever and general aviation airports. This is in contrast to the four distinct categories for the nation's 368 primary airports.

Defining these airports simply as "nonprimary" does not adequately describe the many diverse roles these airports play in their communities. General aviation airports provide a variety of functions, ranging from access for emergency medical services, disaster relief, aerial firefighting, law enforcement and border control to agricultural functions, flight training, charter passenger and time-sensitive air cargo services, among others.

The FAA is working closely with aviation industry stakeholders including associations, state aeronautical agencies, airport directors, airport authorities, airport planners, local councils of governments, and aviation user groups to classify general aviation airports based on the roles they support. These stakeholders agree that more descriptive categories are needed in order to help the general public understand the importance of these airports and their capital investment needs.

With input from aviation industry stakeholders, the FAA will develop a list of classifications for general aviation airports and publish a report by January 2012.

The report will:

- Propose updated federal airport classifications for general aviation airports that reflect the airports' roles in their community, region and national system
- Provide examples to illustrate the value of each airport category
- Provide a framework for a strategic vision for the national system

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