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FEATURED

## Mason City airport gets nearly \$300,000 for upgrades

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An Air Choice One Cessna Caravan taxis to the gate at the Mason City Municipal Airport.

JERRY SMITH, The Globe Gazette

The Iowa Transportation Commission on Monday approved \$7.6 million for the fiscal year 2020 State Aviation Program, and the Mason City Municipal Airport will see improvements because of the funding.



The Mason City Municipal Airport has been a mainstay in the area since it was built in the mid-1940s.

JERRY SMITH, The Globe Gazette

The Airport Improvement Program will fund \$4.5 million for aviation safety, planning and airport development projects at 19 different airports throughout Iowa, including Mason City.

Projects funded through the AIP include runway, taxiway and apron development; fuel systems; navigational aids; maintenance of aviation weather systems; runway marking; windsocks; emergency operational repairs; land-use planning; air service development; and the mitigation of obstruction and wildlife hazards at airports.

AIP programs are funded with revenue from aircraft registration fees and aviation fuel taxes.



The Mason City Municipal Airport is a hub for businesses and private pilots and provides day-to-day aviation services, including aircraft fueling, aircraft tie-down parking and various maintenance services. There also is flight instruction offered.

JERRY SMITH, The Globe Gazette

The Mason City airport will receive \$168,000 from the state for a \$240,000 project to construct hangar taxiline grading to accommodate aircraft forecast to use the hangar area in the near future.

Dave Sims, the airport's operations supervisor for 13 years, said that a new taxiway is in the works that will allow more private hangars to be built, which would in turn attract more companies.

Some of the companies that use the Mason City Municipal Airport include: Target, Eaton, John Deere, Cargill, Iowa State Patrol, the Iowa DNR, Poet, Walmart, Menards, Kraft, HyVee and MercyOne, to name a few.

There are 12 private hangars at the airport, with another currently under construction. There also is a waiting list for the city-owned hangars.

The local airport also will receive \$121,653 from the state for a \$231,000 project to upgrade the terminal and roadway lighting at the airport.

Statewide, aviation vertical infrastructure programs will provide \$3.1 million for projects at 10 general aviation airports and eight commercial service airports throughout Iowa, including the terminal project in Mason City.

## Upgrades equal growth

The transportation services offered at the Mason City Municipal Airport – as well as air cargo and passenger flights – play a key role in the growth of the area, said airport manager Pam Osgood.

“The airport is a vital part for the area to be successful from an economic development standpoint,” she said. “We are the front door of North Iowa and Southern Minnesota.”

Since the first official aircraft landing at the airport on March 29, 1946, expansion of services and the facility have been a constant, Osgood said.

Some of those projects have included fixed-base operator hangar renovations, taxiway project for private hangar, airport taxiway and building expansion projects and a new airport fire department that house two crash vehicles.

The airport just completed a ramp rehabilitation project – of which the state provided a share of the funding – and in 2011 was hooked up to the city of Clear Lake water utility.

“We have a beautiful facility and we keep it up,” Osgood said. “We will continue to do projects, but they are dependent on funding.”

Prior to 2014, the number of people flying into and out of the Mason City Municipal Airport was declining quickly. Osgood said only about 3,300 people annually used the airport for flights between 2010-2013.

Because of that, the airport lost \$1 million in federal funding it counted on annually to help with renovations and expansion.



Air Choice One has continued to grow passenger service at the Mason City Municipal Airport since 2014. More than 8,200 people flew into the airport in 2018 and about the same number flew out on Air Choice One.

JERRY SMITH, The Globe Gazette

That trend began to be reversed in 2014 when Air Choice One took over passenger service at the Mason City Municipal Airport.

In 2017, there were 7,572 enplanements (passengers boarding) and 7,613 deplanements (passengers arriving) recorded at the Mason City airport. In 2018, those numbers increased to 8,250 enplanements (9 percent increase) and 8,207 deplanements (8 percent increase).

“We would love to reach the 10,000 mark to get the \$1 million federal entitlement funds back,” Osgood said. “We certainly didn’t want to lose air service. We want to have an airport that has as much access to the national air transportation system.”

Air Choice One provides four daily flights to Chicago and one daily flight to St. Louis, using eight-seat Cessna Caravan aircraft.

While passenger service is a main draw to the Mason City Municipal Airport, it also is a hub for businesses and private pilots.



The B-29 Superfortress known as Doc landed just after 11 a.m. July 17 in Mason City and offered people a chance for tours and flights.

Jerry Smith/Globe Gazette

Both the 6,501-foot main runway and the 5,502-foot crosswind runway allows for small jets to land and take off. Four of those jets are owned by local businesses.

There also are a variety of general aviation hangars and approximately 67 aircraft are based at the airport.

The FBO provides day-to-day aviation services at the airport, including aircraft fueling, aircraft tie-down parking and various maintenance services. There also is flight instruction offered.

According to Osgood, the airport experiences about 32,000 annual operations, which equates to an economic impact of more than \$11 million annually.

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B-29 Superfortress 'Doc' offers a trip back in time



- Development, growth adds to air of optimism for North Iowa's future
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**Jerry Smith**

Special Projects Editor