



Des Moines airport hits 2 million-passenger mark



Joel Aschbrenner, jaschbrenn@dmreg.com 9:32 p.m. CST December 11, 2014



(Photo: Bryon Houlgrave/The Register)

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More than 2 million travelers have passed through the Des Moines airport this year, putting it on track for another record year.

But airport officials have little time to celebrate as work to find funding for a new terminal to accommodate all those travelers is just getting

started.

This is the third year in a row — and the **third time ever** — that the airport has passed the 2 million-passenger mark.

Through the first 11 months of the year, 2.14 million people have taken off or landed in Des Moines. That's up 5.8 percent from 2.02 million passengers during the same time period last year, according to a report released Thursday by the airport.

Airport Executive Director Kevin Foley attributed the growth to **declining fares**, new flights and the decisions from several airlines to fly larger jets. Continuing that level of growth, though, will depend on adding new routes.

"If we don't get additional flights, I think we'll be close to the national norm for growth of about 2 to 3 percent" a year, Foley said.

The passenger counts **are significant** because the plan to build a new \$468 million terminal is contingent on ridership at the airport growing by 3.5 percent per year. If passenger counts continue growing at least that fast, construction would begin around 2022.

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Perhaps the bigger question is where the airport will find the roughly \$200 million it still needs for the project. Asking the city, state and federal government, even offering naming rights to local businesses, are on the table, airport officials have said.

Earlier this year, the Des Moines Airport Authority Board **hired local business executive David Fisher** as a consultant for the terminal project.

At the airport board's meeting Tuesday, Fisher said the work to develop a funding strategy will start in the spring. So far he has been meeting with local leaders to evaluate their support for the project.

"What we're trying to do now is plant the seeds so when we get into the real crux of identifying the funds ... these people will be there to help us," he said.

The current 11-gate terminal was built in 1948 on the east side of the airfield. Airport officials say it is too small, outdated, poorly suited to facilitate modern security checks and impossible to expand because of adjacent runways. A new 14-gate terminal would be located on the south side of the airfield and would have room to grow.

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In November, the airport served 182,820 passengers, a 1.7 percent increase from the same month a year earlier. It's the smallest monthly increase in ridership the airport has reported this year.

Foley attributed that to new flights added late in 2013. Southwest Airlines launched a daily flight to Las Vegas in late September 2013, making October and November the first months this year to give an accurate picture of passenger growth regardless of the new flight.

Bolstered by the new Las Vegas connection, Southwest has seen a 38 percent increase in passengers to and from Des Moines this year, the most of any airline serving the city.

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