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Iowa City airport upgrades coming

Airport grant to fund new taxiway that will connect 4 future hangars

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When executives from the wholesale chain Costco first visited Iowa City to scout potential locations for a new store, the Iowa City Municipal Airport was their first stop.

Apparently, they liked what they saw. The company opened its Coralville location in June.

The airport is the first thing many people — whether they're CEOs, patients or physicians — see when they visit the area, and that's why people who work at the airport say it's important to keep it looking good and running smoothly.

"We want to make sure we have a good first impression for them out here," said Michael Tharp, the airport's operations specialist.

A \$165,525 grant from the Iowa Transportation Commission's State Aviation Program will go a long way toward achieving that goal, Tharp says. It will be used to build a new taxiway to connect four future hangars and to rehabilitate the roof on the aging terminal building.

The Iowa City Municipal Airport has received similar funding through the State Aviation Program over the past six or seven years. It has gone toward rehabilitating taxiways and buildings, pavement maintenance and major items in need of repair, Tharp said.

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This small taxiway running east to west soon will be expanded thanks to a state grant that also will improve the Iowa City Municipal Airport's main terminal, which was built in 1951. / Benjamin Roberts / Iowa City Press-Citizen

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This year, 34 airports in Iowa got a chunk of the \$1.7 million that the state doled out for airport development projects, said Tim McClung, planning and outreach manager for the Iowa Department of Transportation's Office of Aviation.

The grant includes \$90,525 to install the taxiway and utility lines, which will consist of a transformer and gas main. The nearly 125-foot-long taxiway will connect four nearby hangar units that are in various stages of planning and construction. The taxiway actually will cost about \$106,000 to build, with the amount beyond what the grant covers coming from local match dollars, Tharp said.

Construction on the taxiway will begin within the next few weeks and is expected to be completed by the end of September, Tharp said.

The remaining \$75,000 of the grant will go toward rehabilitating the terminal building, especially the roof, which has been known to leak.

Matt Wolford, manager of Jet Air, which operates the airport's fuel service, said the terminal building, built in 1951, has been well maintained over the years but still is "borderline historic."

"Businesses and people working in the area, that's the first thing they see when they walk in the door," he said. "It's good not to have a leak."

A major tuckpointing project and new flooring last year were big improvements, Wolford said.

The airport has about 30,000 take-offs and landings each year, Tharp said. Space always is an issue, and the four hangars that eventually will surround the future taxiway will provide more room for planes and extra storage, he said.

A 2009 Department of Transportation study found the airport has an \$11 million economic impact in Johnson County, Tharp said.

"We think Iowa City certainly is a hub of economic activity, a fairly important piece to not only the state economy, but the local economy here with regards to the airport," he said, "so anything we can do to make the airport facilities better situated for use, we're going to do what we can."

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