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Iowa airports hope to land millions in state funding

MARCH 4, 2019 BY [O. KAY HENDERSON](#)

Managers of the state's airports are dealing with increased passenger traffic, more cargo and bigger planes — and they're seeking a significant increase in state taxpayer support over the next decade.

"We're doing what we can with the funds we have, but we've got a long way to go," says Marty Lenss, director of the Eastern Iowa Airport in Cedar Rapids.



He cites a recent survey of businesses showed air service was one of the three key factors for business expansion and location decisions.

"You don't have to look very far to see that play out," Lenss says. "Caterpillar pulled out of Peoria, Illinois. It cited as air service connectivity as part of the reason why they pulled their headquarters out after 100 years of being in that community."

The eight Iowa airports with commercial passenger service are asking for \$13.5 million in state support in each of the next 10 years. Lenss says the money's needed because Iowa's airports need to be updated. In Cedar Rapids, they had record passenger traffic and a 22 percent increase in cargo traffic just last year.

"Because of the growth in both segments, we're having what I'd call some elbow room issues on the apron because the airplanes have gotten bigger, so we we need more wingtip clearance," Lenss says, "so we're working to separate the air cargo to a new location on the airfield."

Some of that work has started in Cedar Rapids. The state's largest airport in Des Moines is facing the same issues. A.J. Graff, director of operations at the Des Moines Airport Authority, says passengers are seeing it.

"Our hold rooms were designed to accommodate DC9 aircraft back in the '60s when those were built. The aircraft we have at those gates now are significantly larger," Graff says. "Especially in the early morning, that peak period, it's standing-room-only for passengers as they wait to get on their aircraft."

Graff says the Des Moines Airport has to be creative to accommodate flights at the times the airlines want to fly them.

"Aircraft that come in the evening, they sit at the airport overnight and then they leave first thing in the morning to fee those hubs, that's really where we're feeling the strain," Graff says. "...I'm not saying we're there, but we're getting close to maximizing the facility."

Chris Wood, general manager of the Region of Waterloo Airport, says his airport needs new hangar space for clients flying in on modern aircraft with wider wings and taller tails.

"Corporate clients that we have frequenting Waterloo such as John Deere, Target — because they have a significant warehouse and distribution center in Cedar Falls and others," he says. "Menards is another one."

The Iowa Public Airports Association is also asking legislators to set aside \$3 million in each of the next 10 years for the 110 general aviation airports around the state. The total request for all Iowa airports is \$16.5 million for next year alone. In the current year, Iowa's 118 airports are splitting \$2.2 million in state funding.

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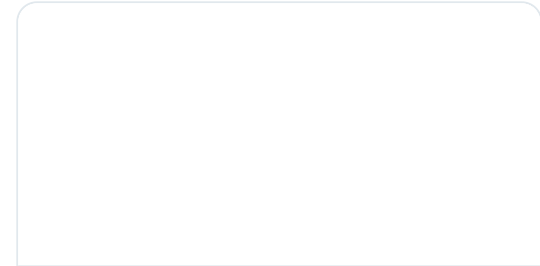


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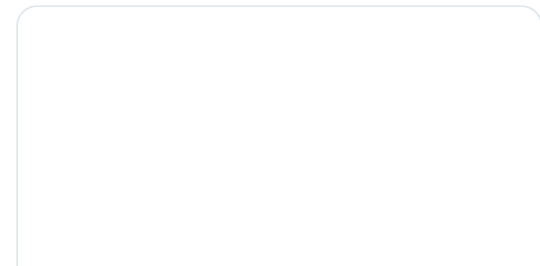
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