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# New airport director sees new terminal for Des Moines

Current, 66-year-old facility is 'becoming stretched,' Foley says

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new flights take off from Des Moines airport ...: New airport executive director Kevin Foley discusses the outlook for ing new flights this year.



Written by **Joel Aschbrenner**

Kevin Foley believes a new terminal is in the Des Moines International Airport's future.

OPEN

Foley, who was appointed executive director of the airport last week, said the primary question facing airport leaders is what to do about the 66-year-old terminal as passenger numbers continue to grow.

“The biggest challenge is staying ahead of the growth,” he said. “The facility we’re currently in is becoming stretched. Passenger processing is becoming difficult during peak periods of the day. ... This facility, being built in 1948, just isn’t going to accommodate another addition.”



'The biggest challenge is staying ahead of the growth' in passenger traffic, Kevin Foley says. / Mary Willie/The Register

## Kevin Foley

Executive director of the Des Moines International Airport

**Age:** 56

**Education:** A bachelor's degree in aviation management and a master of business administration degree from the University of Dubuque

**Family:** Wife: Gerri; son: Ryan; daughter: Alicia

**Career:** Foley has worked for the Des Moines International Airport for five years, previously serving as general manager, assistant executive director and property administrator. He previously worked for the Dubuque Regional Airport and as a commercial pilot and associate professor of aviation at the University of Dubuque. Before that, he farmed for nine years near Belle Plaine.

Some answers will come March 11, when a site study detailing where the airport can build or expand is set to be released.

Foley was selected to replace Don Smithey, who retired last week as executive director.

Smithey helped transition the airport from a city department to a more autonomous agency run by a board of directors. He also recruited Southwest Airlines to Des Moines, helping passenger numbers grow to record levels.

Foley, who had been Smithey's assistant, talked with the Register about the direction of the airport. Here is an edited interview:

**Q: How do you plan to fill Don Smithey's shoes?**

**A:** It's a big set of shoes to fill, but we continue to set the course for the airport through the board. For the past seven months we've been doing a terminal site plan that will set, for quite some time, the work we will be doing here.

**Q: What will the site plan tell us?**

**A:** It will tell us where we should be placing things. Should we build

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a new terminal in place? Should we move to a new location?  
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There were mistakes in the past where buildings were just plopped down next to other buildings, and it just doesn't function well today.

**Q: Do you think the airport will have a new terminal in the next decade?**

A: Yes. Right now during the peak periods of the day we are beyond capacity of this terminal. And with the way it is sitting today, we're limited in expanding it because of some building restriction lines — we're butting up against runways.

**Q: Before moving to Des Moines, how did you get into aviation?**

A: My wife and I farmed through the '80s. I was a licensed applicator of pesticide. They would bring in an aerial applicator when the crops got too tall, and I always thought that looked like an exciting way to make a living.

**Q: But you decided to become a commercial pilot instead of a crop duster.**

A: I got to thinking about it, and at the time I had two small children and decided that being in those chemicals all day was probably not the healthiest way to make a living, but I had already done some flying and was hooked on it.

**Q: When was the last time you flew?**

Probably April 2008.



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**Q: Do you miss it?**

A: You don't realize how much you miss it until you fly again and think, "This is so much fun. Why don't I do this more often?" I just haven't had the time.

**Q: Last week the airport hired Pro-Tec Fire Services, a private company, to replace the Iowa Air National Guard's fire department, which is being disbanded as military flights cease at the airport this year. The move drew protests from union leaders. Why go with Pro-Tec?**

A: Pro-Tec had the experience at a cost that was very similar to us doing it ourselves. It just made sense to go with Pro-Tec. And that was after a fairly extensive time of trying to work with the guard to keep its (fire department) in place. The guard simply couldn't accommodate that request, because the guard hadn't done that (operate an airport fire department in the absence of military flights) before.

**Q: The airport set records with more than 2 million passengers each of the past two years. What do you expect for 2014?**

A: I expect the trend to continue. The airport received a couple of flights late in the year, like the Southwest flight to Las Vegas, which started in September. Looking ahead, Allegiant is definitely bringing back the (seasonal) Los Angeles flight. And of course, we're going to seek more flights.

**Q: Will we get any new flights in 2014?**

A: Hopefully. We continue to ask Southwest, of course, for a St. Louis connection: a flight from Des Moines to St. Louis on down to Orlando. A second Frontier flight into Denver. There is also demand for another Las Vegas flight on Southwest. That flight runs near 100 percent (full) on every flight. I do think the airlines are looking for additional city pairs for us. It's just a matter of whether they think they can make money.

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