

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Master Plan Update for Milwaukee County's General Mitchell International Airport (GMIA) establishes a program for the improvement of existing facilities and the development of new facilities at the Airport over the next 20 years. This plan updates the analysis and conclusions of the Master Plan that was adopted by the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors in 1993.

A comprehensive undertaking, the Master Plan Update process identifies the type and extent of facilities that are required to meet projections of aviation demand and evaluates a range of alternatives for improving the facilities, consistent with forecast requirements. The process culminates with the recommendation of a preferred alternative. All functions at the Airport are considered, including the airfield, terminal-related passenger services, cargo, general aviation, airport support and access. The Master Plan Update includes substantial input from key stakeholders, including Airport tenants, public oversight agencies such as the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), other public agencies, selected officials from Milwaukee County and surrounding municipalities, citizens, business groups, and community leaders that have a stake in the future of the Airport.

This Update of the 1993 Master Plan begins with vision. The vision is a collection of statements that provide a composite picture of a GMIA 20 years in the future that meets the many needs of its stakeholders. The vision guides the analyses in the Master Plan Update and is used during the decision-making process to select a preferred development alternative. This chapter presents the vision of GMIA as expressed by the Airport's stakeholders. This chapter also includes an assessment of the Airport's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The assessment is the basis for the visionary statements that were ultimately developed.

1.1 VISION OF THE AIRPORT'S FUTURE

A vision of the Airport's future was formulated after seeking input from many individuals and groups. Interviews were conducted with 25 key stakeholders, including representatives of the travel, tourism, and transportation industries, and elected officials from the municipalities surrounding the Airport, County Supervisors, and the County Executives of Milwaukee, Racine and Waukesha. A workshop was conducted with the public. Focus groups were organized and meetings were conducted with planning professionals, community leaders and citizens. A brainstorming session with the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) began the process by soliciting input from agencies that regulate and plan for airport and ground transportation development. Together, these individuals and groups contributed to the template for the Airport's future.

The vision that emerged from this process, in general, reflects two overall themes:

- Continue and enhance those things that the Airport does well now.
- Address new issues and initiatives necessary for the future, as articulated in the Master Plan Update.

Features that should be continued and enhanced are embodied in the following visions which affirm that the Airport:

- *...is customer friendly.* Overall, the Airport offers a pleasing and efficient experience for travelers and employees. The Airport is well-managed and operates efficiently and effectively. It is easy to get around inside the Passenger Terminal Building, which is modern, clean, and offers travelers many and various concessions and amenities.
- *...is readily accessible.* The Airport is very accessible for travelers and business employees with local trips originating from Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington and Waukesha Counties.

- *...meets the air travel needs of the southeastern Wisconsin region.* The Airport is an important economic asset to the Metropolitan Milwaukee and southeastern Wisconsin areas. Additional nonstop flights should be pursued to domestic destinations not currently served. The Airport has capitalized on the growing passenger market of northeastern Illinois.

Over the 20-year planning horizon and beyond, General Mitchell International Airport should remain the airport of choice for southeastern Wisconsin, and should be a competitive alternative to outlying markets.

- *...operates safely, securely and efficiently.* The Airport must continue to provide a safe, secure and efficient operating environment for passengers, employees, baggage and cargo. The airfield, passenger terminal, parking and aviation support areas are configured and operated to meet these needs. Airport improvements are planned and implemented in a manner that is compatible with, and integrated with, operation of aircraft in both the Milwaukee and Chicago airspace area. Continuation and enhancement of Airport security should be integrated with the overall physical planning and operation of the Airport's facilities. The Airport should continue to meet the standards and requirements of the FAA.
- *...is financially self-supporting, and is a cost-effective place for the airlines to do business.* The Airport is currently self-sustaining, and is viewed by airlines and other tenants as an attractive place to do business. This is due to several factors that include the relatively low operating costs at the Airport (in comparison to competitor airports and other airports with similar size and market characteristics) and the business-like management approach taken by the Airport's administration. Stakeholders describe the Airport's administration as proactive in dealing with issues, cooperative with users and tenants, and efficient in the way the Airport is operated. The need and timing of new and improved facilities should continue to be balanced with the maintenance of reasonable user charges.
- *...reflects the business-like character of Metropolitan Milwaukee.* The planning and implementation of future improvements to the Airport reflect the following features of the Milwaukee region: they are practical, reasonable, and sized and timed correctly to meet the needs of the traveling public in an efficient and cost-effective manner.
- *...is a good neighbor.* Milwaukee County continues its proactive approach in minimizing the impacts resulting from aircraft and airport operations on its neighbors and the environment. Much has been accomplished as a result of several Milwaukee County programs that include: the Airport Noise Compatibility Program (Part 150 Program); the Ground Run-up Enclosure and; the Home Owner Protection Program

(HOPP). In addition, Milwaukee County has several environmental programs in place to reduce impacts from the runoff produced from deicing fluids and its impacts on water quality. There is a belief held by some persons living in and representing noise-impacted areas that these programs should continue and that more needs to be done. Communities and citizens located around the Airport are becoming increasingly concerned about potential environmental issues related to deicing, air and water quality, and wetlands protection. This vision holds that future development at the Airport will occur in an environmentally sound manner, balancing development needs with protection of the environment.

- *...develops in a manner that incorporates planning for compatible land uses.* Milwaukee County has acquired land for the purposes of preserving the opportunity for future Airport development, as well as preserving a buffer area between the Airport and its noise-sensitive neighbors. Planning for the compatible development of land areas adjoining the Airport is necessary in order to ensure compatibility with Airport operations and to maximize the economic development potential of these areas for the cities in which they are located. Neighboring cities are concerned about the potential loss of tax base related to Airport expansion. To ensure the best use of the land, the Airport and its neighbors should coordinate efforts for the planning and use of land near the Airport.
- *...is an engine for growth of the economy.* The Airport plays a critical role in maintaining and attracting business to the Metropolitan Milwaukee area, as well as the region. It is a vital part of the infrastructure that supports economic sustainability and future growth.

Businesses often look at several key factors when selecting their location. One important need is close proximity to an attractive, efficient airport. Another important need is an airport with reliable, affordable, non-stop and direct airline service to destinations of choice. Greater Milwaukee is the home of major medical centers, universities, and corporations whose employees are extensive and frequent business travelers. The existence of a first-rate airport with excellent domestic air service is a business necessity, as well as a central issue in recruiting and retaining top flight employees.

- *...fosters compatible economic development opportunities for adjacent communities and areas.* The Airport has identified and pursued “win-win” decisions regarding the longstanding land use and land development issues. Examples include: the operations and needs of the Air Force Reserve and Wisconsin Air National Guard units; the compatible development and/or redevelopment of land on College and Howell Avenues; and the business park developments in St. Francis and Cudahy.

New features to be incorporated in future plans and policies emphasize that GMIA:

- *...is an integral component of the region's network of other transportation modes.* Although air travelers and employees find travel to and from the Airport readily accessible and convenient from Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington and Waukesha Counties, those residing or doing business in the southern counties would benefit from improved access. The quality and convenience of transportation to the Airport ensures that the passengers experience a seamless trip from the point of origin to the gate. Airport access and connections via a variety of transportation modes (high-speed rail service, light rail connector, park-and-ride opportunities, and rubber-tired vehicles) should be explored.
- *...generates employment opportunities.* Future Airport growth should provide employment opportunities at the Airport itself and in related businesses located in the Airport vicinity. Future Airport growth should also promote employment opportunities throughout the regional economy.

Throughout the visioning process, stakeholders affirmed that the Airport is a regional asset and is valued by the public. Fulfillment of the preceding visions will ensure continued support of the Airport by its users, as well as businesses throughout the Airport's expanding air service area. To the greatest extent possible, the Master Plan Update applies the visions to assess the potential for aviation demand, and to screen facility improvement alternatives in order to accommodate this demand.

1.2 ASSESSMENT OF THE AIRPORT'S STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

As part of the early planning process, key stakeholders were asked to assess the Airport's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the Airport as a means of uncovering critical issues that should be addressed. Strengths and weaknesses describe existing conditions at the onset of the planning process, whereas opportunities and threats are potential future conditions that the planning effort must anticipate in the development of recommended Airport improvements.

This assessment provided a beginning point for the Master Plan Update, and is used to guide tasks such as the projection of aviation demand and the identification of facility needs and requirements. Many comments were received from GMIA's stakeholders during the course of identifying the Airport's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In some instances, the input that was received was not directly related to the Master Plan Update, although it is relevant to other aspects of the Airport or Airport administration. All pertinent comments are included in the following discussion for the sake of completeness.

1.2.1 Strengths

The Airport has many characteristics that signal its continued role as the airport of choice for southeastern Wisconsin over the next 20 years. These strengths range from the quality of the Airport's facilities and the strength of its economic base, to its reputation as a well-run, efficient facility and an economical place to do business for its airlines. These strengths are:

- *The Airport is efficiently managed and operated.* The Airport has a good relationship with external groups, regional agencies and tenants. It is a relatively low-cost operation for an airport of its size. There is a history and willingness of Airport management to support the needs of the airlines and other operators. It is also known for having exceptional communication with Airport users and the FAA. The Airport's facilities in place today are modern, clean and user friendly.
- *The Airport is expandable.* The Airport can accommodate today's demand for air travel with its runway and taxiway system. The existing Airport infrastructure is generally in good condition and previous planning efforts have designated areas for expansion of the airfield, although conversion of some current Airport tenant's uses would be required for the expansion of the terminal, airfield and support areas.
- *The Airport is accessible to a large majority of its customers.* The Airport is easily accessible to travelers and employees by roadway via Interstates 94 and 43. On-Airport parking is generally available, except during certain peak times, and should continue to improve in the near-term future

with the opening and operation of the parking garage addition. The Airport has earned a reputation of being a “hassle-free” travel experience.

- *Air service is reliable and provided to major destinations.* Midwest Express Airlines is a good anchor for reliable air service. Based in the Milwaukee area, Midwest Express (and its subsidiary Skyway) has a strong presence and serves a large number of destination cities throughout the country. Northwest Airlines and the balance of the carriers complement Midwest's operations and provide a competitive air carrier base. Air cargo can be shipped quickly and efficiently because of the presence of multiple cargo carriers at GMIA.
- *The Airport is a good neighbor.* Airport management has been proactive in dealing with community issues, particularly noise mitigation. Other environmental initiatives augment this “good neighbor” perception, including proactive and innovative programs for water quality, surface runoff, and deicing.
- *The Airport has a large, positive impact on the economy and on the region.* The quality and type of air service is a critical factor for business leaders when deciding where their operations will be located. The provision of air service, in addition to the direct and indirect impacts of the employees, businesses and users of the Airport, is a large component of the region's economic health.

1.2.2 Weaknesses

Despite the many and varied strengths that will continue at the Airport into the future, the stakeholders identified a number of weaknesses that can be addressed to ensure that its future remains bright. Many of these weaknesses are addressed in this Master Plan Update. Weaknesses of importance include:

- *Airfield improvements are required.* Similar to many comparable mature airports throughout the country, GMIA's airfield configuration was designed to accommodate the needs of an earlier era of the aviation industry. The number, lengths and placement of the runways and taxiways are less than optimal to accommodate the level and type of operations projected for the 20-year planning horizon, and beyond. In some instances, parts of the airfield do not meet present-day FAA standards for Runway Safety Areas (RSA) and other requirements.

- *Nonstop service to additional domestic markets is needed, as well as lower air fares.* Air carriers have established nonstop and direct service to more than 50 domestic cities, of which 13 are served by multiple carriers, while 32 are served solely by Midwest Express and/or Skyway. The proximity of the Airport to Chicago O'Hare, one of the nation's busiest facilities, with numerous nonstop, domestic and international destinations, results in a percentage of travelers from the Milwaukee region selecting O'Hare as their Airport of choice to reach these destinations. More frequent service within the State of Wisconsin is desirable, especially to Madison, Green Bay, Eau Claire/Chippewa Valley and the Fox River Valley.

Several attractive destination cities are not currently served nonstop year-round (Miami, New Orleans and Seattle) and other markets are presently underserved (Charlotte, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Orlando, Fort Myers and Tampa).

- *More low-fare service is needed.* The absence of an established discount fare carrier has resulted in high fares to several markets. New service to unserved and underserved markets is important to both business and leisure travelers originating trips from the Milwaukee Region. The inception of service by AirTran, and potentially other discount carriers, can act to reduce fares.
- *The passenger terminal facility needs to be updated to meet emerging and future needs.* Similar to the airfield, the passenger terminal facility was designed and built to accommodate a differing set of needs. Terminal improvement is necessary to accommodate projected future growth and to incorporate evolving requirements for security. Additionally, airline mergers and acquisitions have resulted in the underutilization of several existing gates. As enhanced security requirements are developed and implemented, additional attention needs to be given to providing amenities within the concourses and within the central terminal for a traveling public with wide ranges of interests and needs.
- *Current environmental concerns could affect the implementation of Airport improvements.* Aircraft noise, land use compatibility, wetland impacts, air quality and runoff from deicing of aircraft and pavement are frequently mentioned as environmental concerns that will continue to require careful attention. Although Airport management has established a reputation for being proactive and innovative in handling environmental issues, Airport neighbors and their representatives still have concerns, particularly about noise, that will be important considerations in planning Airport improvement initiatives.
- *The availability of land areas required for expansion is uncertain.* Although a progression of previous planning activities has identified

expansion potential at the Airport, adjacent land areas (both within the Airport property and adjacent to it) are developed, or are constrained by current uses; e.g., College Avenue and other major roads, railroad tracks, and wetlands. Coordination will be necessary with the cities surrounding the Airport, regulatory agencies and the two military facilities in order to address land use and economic development issues. Land use conversion or redevelopment may be necessary in order to provide adequate area to expand the Airport to meet its future demand.

- *There is a lack of high-speed rail service between northern Illinois and southeastern Wisconsin.* Although roadway access to the Airport is good from Milwaukee County and adjacent counties, lack of rail transit makes the Airport less accessible to the southern counties in Wisconsin and the northern counties in Illinois. High speed rail service, with a connecting stop at the Airport, is seen as an opportunity to capture additional market share and business. Other types of rail connections via Amtrak or Metro should be explored.
- *There is no coherent economic development strategy for the region.* With numerous jurisdictions responsible for economic development and quality of life improvements in the Metropolitan Milwaukee areas and adjacent areas, economic development initiatives have been somewhat disjointed and uncoordinated. Although new initiatives such as the Wingspread Accord are making initial attempts to rectify this situation, future decisions regarding development need to be addressed. The implementation timetables for transportation and infrastructure improvements, economic development initiatives and optimization of land use near the Airport need to be discussed and coordinated.
- *Alternative governance structures for a regional asset such as the Airport should be explored.* There is a widespread perception that policy direction of the governance of the Airport does not proportionately represent all of the area served by the Airport. About one-half of the Airport's passengers originate in Milwaukee County. There is a further perception that an alternative governance structure, such as a regional airport authority, may be better suited for the development of a regional asset with enormous direct and indirect impacts on the regional economy.

1.2.3 Opportunities

Change is constant and the nature of airport operations is no exception. Several opportunities that will benefit the future growth of GMIA were identified by stakeholders:

- *Capitalize on the growing northeastern Illinois market.* Regardless of the prospects or the timetables for the planning and implementation of improvements to Chicago O'Hare International Airport (or the potential construction of a new airport in the Chicago region), GMIA is an option for the Chicago region business and leisure travelers as well as air cargo shippers.
- *Enhance the Airport's attractiveness to new entrant, low-fare airlines.* By providing adequate runway capacity, passenger terminal amenities and parking, the Airport will be an increasingly attractive place for new entrant airlines to do business. By continuing to provide a business environment for airlines that features very low operating costs and good airline relations, the opportunity for new or enhanced service by low-fare carriers such as AirTran, Southwest, Jet Blue and others can be realized.
- *Maximize the revenue-producing potential of the Airport property and assets.* The Master Plan Update can provide a basis for the development of traditional and nontraditional uses of underutilized land areas and facilities that will further enhance revenues. By gaining consensus for the optimum use of Airport land, revenue-enhancing strategies can be implemented. These strategies can include redeveloping areas on the Airport and capitalizing on opportunities for joint economic development.
- *Plan for the resolution of long-standing infrastructure needs.* The Master Plan Update can be a catalyst for broadening the discussion of and planning for regional infrastructure improvements. For example, reconstruction of the southeastern Wisconsin freeway system may be identified as a necessity to ensure reliable access to the Airport from the surrounding region. Additionally, synergy can occur between the plans for the Airport and other plans for transportation improvement, economic development, and quality of life enhancement in the region.
- *Identify the optimum governance plan for the Airport in the future.* Alternative governance arrangements for the Airport can be examined. The best method available for operating this major economic asset to the Milwaukee region can be identified.
- *Identify and accommodate needs of travelers with disabilities, and an aging population.* As the general population ages, the Airport needs to anticipate and accommodate these needs (wheelchairs, strollers, heights of ticket counters, pay telephones, motorized carts and signage). It will also be important that airline and airport staff are trained to assist people with disabilities.

1.2.4 Threats

Although there are many opportunities for the Airport, several important threats to its future need to be addressed. The following items were identified as the most critical threats to be faced:

- *The potential for encroachment by incompatible land uses will need to be addressed.* If not monitored closely, incompatible development can limit the future improvement and development of the Airport, and eliminate the opportunities for increasing its capacity. At present, there are three power plants in the developmental stage within the vicinity of the Airport. Also, retention ponds placed in nearby industrial parks can become wildlife habitats and may attract birds (to the detriment of the safety of aircraft in flight).

The existence of multiple public jurisdictions in the vicinity of the Airport, each with local land use control, poses the potential problem of incompatible land development. As noted in 1.2.3 Opportunities, however, there is a chance for municipal agencies and jurisdictions to work collaboratively to identify and implement compatible land use planning for areas near the Airport. Several stakeholders that were interviewed indicated their willingness to pursue joint economic development initiatives or similar strategies.

- *New security requirements are emerging and changing the way that Airport managers operate and plan their facilities.* In the aftermath of the events of September 2001, numerous changes have taken place in the ways that airports operate as well as plan for the future. With the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) assuming primary jurisdiction for overall Airport security, new requirements are emerging to reduce risks to the Airport passengers and employees. There must be extensive dialogue and close cooperation between the Airport management and the TSA to ensure that security considerations are integrated into planning for future Airport facilities. The Airport facilities must be planned with sufficient flexibility to accommodate any future TSA changes in procedures and requirements.
- *Air travel may decline if the economy continues to decline, causing Airport improvements to be forestalled.* An extended economic downturn may significantly reduce air travel. Business and leisure travel can decrease, causing a significant loss of passengers and revenue. If this should happen, revenues to fund improvements will decline. Also, key airlines serving the Airport may withdraw or reduce their presence at the Airport.

- *Airline consolidations and other aviation industry upheavals can have a negative impact on Milwaukee.* Mergers, acquisitions, consolidations, bankruptcies and other traumatic events in the airline industry can directly impact the Airport's ability to maximize its potential. An airport that is heavily dependent on a single carrier for the majority of its flights (as well as underwriting its operating costs and capital improvements) can be severely impacted if its major airline is acquired or is consolidated.
- *Airport development needs may have significant effects on community assets, such as the Air Force Reserve or Air National Guard facilities.* Existing operations and future facility needs of the military units based at the Airport must be considered in any long-term plans. In particular, if airfield improvements dictate the replacement, relocation or closure of these facilities, every effort to accommodate them on the Airport property should be made.
- *Increasingly stringent environmental requirements may make needed Airport improvements too expensive.* Existing and future environmental requirements can have extensive, and expensive, ramifications for airport operations and future development. Increasing costs due to environmental regulation could reduce the Airport's attractiveness as a cost-effective place to do business and may affect the viability of future capital improvements.
- *Local opposition to Airport development due to concerns over noise and land use compatibility may delay expansion.* Although the results of the stakeholder interviews indicated widespread recognition of the need for a viable and thriving Airport, public officials and citizens have indicated that aircraft noise is a concern of neighborhoods near the Airport. Airport management's strong track record as a good neighbor has provided a reservoir of good will. Nevertheless, there will be close scrutiny of those proposed Airport improvements which could potentially result in loss of tax base, increases in noise, and emissions impacting air and water quality.

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With a vision for the future of the Airport in place, the next step of the Master Plan Update process is an inventory of existing conditions, including the physical facilities as well as the environmental and community setting of this important regional asset. Chapter 2.0 presents the existing conditions at GMIA.