

1. Introduction

The Airport is located east of the City of St. Cloud, Minnesota, in the northern portion of Sherburne County. The Airport is owned and operated by the City of St. Cloud. An Airport Board appointed by the Mayor provides oversight, but not policy decision. The City of St. Cloud city council and city staff make policy decisions regarding the Airport. Daily operation is under the control of the Airport Director. Within the St. Cloud area there are several jurisdictions including: Benton, Sherburne and Stearns Counties, Haven and Minden Townships, and the cities of St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids, Sartell, and Waite Park. **Exhibit 1-1** depicts the St. Cloud area and the location of the Airport.

The Airport supports a variety of aviation activity, including commercial passenger service, corporate aviation, general aviation and flight training. Northwest Airlink provides commercial passenger service to and from Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. The Airport's new Airport Traffic Control Tower (ATCT) opened on November 8, 2004 under the operations of Midwest Air Traffic Control.

1.1 Purpose of this Master Plan Update

Minnesota Department of Transportation Office of Aeronautics (MnDOT) commissioned a *Tier 2 Air Service Study* (Tier 2 Study)¹ in 2001 to assess the potential for growth and development of smaller commercial service airports in the Minnesota and Wisconsin System of Airports. The Tier 2 Study, completed in June 2003, identified long-term opportunities for the St. Cloud Regional Airport, including serving as a:

- Spoke in mainline carrier networks
- Reliever airport for Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport
- Business center for aviation related and commercial enterprise
- Regional triage center
- Center for aircraft maintenance
- Center for cargo and cargo distribution facilities
- Recipient of MSP airport divestiture
- Multi-modal transportation hub
- National guard headquarters and military training and deployment center

To prepare for these opportunities, the Tier 2 Study recommended that the Tier 2 airports work to improve air service at their individual and collective airports; plan for long term development of facilities and land acquisition to support those facilities; and implement detailed business planning and property management systems. In 2002, the cities of Brainerd and St. Cloud received \$1 million from the US Department of Transportation, one of the largest first year Small Community Air Service Development Pilot Program grants. MnDOT, the Initiative Foundation and the cities of Brainerd and St. Cloud contributed additional funds. The business community also pledged support through the creation of two travel banks. Through the Air 21 Project, St. Cloud has been engaged in air service marketing with some successes despite current market conditions. In addition, the City of St. Cloud has extended the Airport's primary runway and commissioned the new Air Traffic Control Tower.

¹ *Tier 2 Air Service Study, Minnesota in Partnership with Wisconsin*, Office of Aeronautics, Minnesota Department of Transportation, June 2003.



Source: Minnesota Department of Transportation Office of Transportation Data & Analysis
Prepared by: Ricondo & Associates, Inc., Nov. 2004

Exhibit 1-1



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Additionally, representatives of the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC), Metropolitan (Metro) Council, MnDOT and the Tier 2 Steering Committee recognized that the St. Cloud Regional Airport would be the logical site for an additional commercial service airport to serve the Minneapolis/St. Paul region. As such, it was recognized that the City of St. Cloud would need to move quickly to halt encroachment of residential and other incompatible land uses around the Airport in areas that may be needed for future Airport expansion. This Master Plan Study was initiated to identify areas required for potential long-term aviation development, prepare a plan for incremental expansion, and assist the City of St. Cloud in business and financial planning to support development.

1.2 The Region's Vision for the Airport

Interviews were held with airport stakeholders on October 20 - 22, 2004 in St. Cloud, and on October 26, 2004 by telephone. The Master Plan Study Team conducted these meetings to better understand the Airport sponsor's and public officials' vision for the Airport and ensure that the Study Team would be working from a common understanding of the issues with the Airport sponsor. The following people were interviewed:

- Mayor
- City Council Representatives
- City Administrator
- Finance Director
- Airport Director
- Public Services Director
- Director of Planning
- Airport Board
- St. Cloud Chamber of Commerce President
- St. Cloud Economic Development Partnership Director
- MnDOT Aeronautics Division Director and staff

From those interviewed, a common vision and set of issues emerged. Although the Master Plan Study will not include an air service initiative, issues regarding air service were discussed in the interviews and so are included in this initial discussion. The following points summarize the findings of the interview process.

- **Urban growth along the I-94/Highway 10 corridor between St. Cloud and Minneapolis/St. Paul, is expected to continue**, making the St. Cloud area a virtual suburb of the Twin Cities over a 10 to 20 year period. Not only are commuters expected to live in St. Cloud and work in the Twin Cities, but also commutes may occur the other way. Improvements to the ground transportation network will provide better north-south connections between St. Cloud and the Twin Cities, and east-west across the Mississippi River tying the west side of St. Cloud to the east and the Airport. Traffic congestion in the Twin Cities and along the corridor has made drive time longer and unreliable in terms of schedule. The planned North Star Rail Corridor is expected to improve connectivity between St. Cloud and the Twin Cities.
- **St. Cloud Regional Airport is the most likely second air carrier airport to serve the Twin Cities region** compared to any of the other Tier 2 airports (Duluth, Eau Claire, and Rochester). Proximity to the Twin Cities, Airport infrastructure, population growth trends, and the ability for the Airport to develop further are factors that contribute to this view.

- **Urban encroachment on the Airport is viewed as a serious issue that must be addressed quickly.** National developers have begun housing developments in various parts of the area. City growth is limited to the north and west due to environmental considerations and geology. Legislative action placed a moratorium on development within the state-specified air safety zones around all Minnesota airports that were in the process of conducting master plan updates. This moratorium, which expires in mid-May 2005, halted a residential development to the northwest of the St. Cloud Regional Airport. As development pressures increase, landowners will be more interested in selling, land values will increase, and political jurisdictions will be interested in reaping tax benefits of new development.
- **Some type of multi-jurisdictional development planning or oversight may be valuable for the Airport.** The City of St. Cloud prepares a long-range land use plan for the area in collaboration with the various townships, cities and counties. However, a coordinated, ongoing effort to review development plans could provide orderly development that would be mutually beneficial to the Airport and the various jurisdictions. The City of St. Cloud has orderly annexation agreements with both Minden and Haven townships (to the north and south of the Airport, respectively) that are expected to encourage collaborative development. All of these jurisdictions should participate in the Master Plan Study process.
- **St. Cloud area businesses and the general population are supportive of Airport initiatives and recognize the Airport as a significant economic generator.** A tax referendum to fund the runway extension several years ago passed in all six of the area cities. In a poll recently conducted of area businesses by the St. Cloud Area Chamber of Commerce, the Airport ranked number two in funding importance after the library.
- **Acquisition of property around the Airport will require a substantial investment, necessitating that the City obtains state and federal funding as well as support from other local jurisdictions.** Funding assistance will be needed from the State of Minnesota/MnDOT and the FAA, as well as other local jurisdictions such as Benton, Stearns and Sherburne counties. The City has been successful in obtaining funds for past projects and expects to continue in that success. The November 2004 regional tax referendum to extend the sales tax to fund various projects included a measure for funding land acquisition around the Airport. This measure passed by a wide majority.
- **If the Airport is to be a de facto part of the Minneapolis-St. Paul regional airport system, then coordinated marketing and planning with the MAC, as the sponsor of that airport system, would be useful in optimizing use of all airports within the region.** Informal coordination has been underway with MAC. One of St. Cloud's City Council representatives sits on the MAC board, and MAC representatives have been to visit the Airport to provide advice and insights.
- **The market will drive development, however the Airport needs to be poised to respond to opportunities.** The types of urban development that occur in St. Cloud and along the I-94/Highway 10 corridor will help determine the demand for air service. In addition, the Airport should be prepared to capitalize on opportunities due to migration of businesses or activity from the Twin Cities. Preparation of a long-term plan will define development areas on-Airport, verify the need for infrastructure improvements, allow identification of land acquisition and land use controls, and focus needs for funding. The development plan can be used to guide orderly incremental development of the Airport to increase revenues and ensure that development is compatible with long-term growth.

- **To be successful, the Airport needs to be easy to use, accessible, and comfortable.** Any plans for development should retain the ease of use since this is an important factor in travelers selecting to travel from the Airport. The Airport's user-friendly nature should be publicized to residents in the region.
- **The majority of residents in the area do not have a clear understanding of what goes on at the Airport and its importance to the community.** Unless residents travel from the Airport or have attended one of the open houses during Summerfest, there is very little opportunity to go to the Airport. Therefore, the general public has little understanding of the type or level of aviation activity that takes place at the Airport. The campaign to recruit the Air National Guard Blackhawk Helicopter Unit from St. Paul to St. Cloud broadened the public awareness of the Airport to some extent in terms of economic benefits and jobs, however, more could be done to draw the public to the Airport.
- **The Airport terminal will need to be expanded if a new carrier serves St. Cloud or multiple departures and or arrivals occur at the same time.** The passenger waiting area is cramped with more than one regional flight at a time. Security screening has exacerbated the condition. Parking may need to be expanded, and a restaurant facing the airfield (rather than the parking lot) might produce more interest and revenues.
- **The mix of aircraft traffic (commercial turboprops, corporate jets, student pilot training, and other general aviation) is the biggest concern in terms of airfield use and capacity.** The ATCT will improve safety, but is also expected to increase flight training traffic since it will provide valuable instrument approach training that can't be obtained at other nearby airports.

Although this Master Plan Study will not address air service, several comments regarding air service were received and should be considered when addressing the physical planning of the Airport. It was noted that charter flights from the Airport have been very popular, although the terminal isn't spacious enough to comfortably process the number of passengers using the larger charters. Frequency and reliability of service into and out of the Airport could be expected to boost usage of the Airport, as would air service to another hub destination. Flight delays and cancellations into and out of St. Cloud Regional Airport create hardships for travelers. Businesses want reliable, frequent, and economical air service with a choice of destinations when considering relocation to or expansion in the St. Cloud area. Service to another hub such as Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, or Denver would open up new markets to travelers. It was also generally thought that the public would view jet aircraft, rather than turboprops, as a customer service improvement.

1.3 Master Plan Goals and Objectives

Based on the shared vision for the Airport, the Master Plan Study will take a two-pronged approach, presenting an implementable 20-year plan while also assessing anticipated needs to meet longer term growth over the 40 to 50-year period so that aviation resources can be protected from encroachment by residential and other incompatible land uses.

Goal 1: Protect for future airport development

Objectives:

- Identify and prioritize land acquisition needs for long-term airport development to allow the City to initiate environmental reviews and to raise the funds required to purchase the property.
- Prepare a “2050 Plan” for long-term (40 to 50-year) development. The 2050 Plan concept would generally define the “ultimate” airport boundaries, potential airfield configuration and capacity, on-Airport land use, access and utility infrastructure.
- Identify off-Airport land use controls that the City could implement, with the cooperation of other jurisdictions, to maintain compatibility.

Goal 2: Prepare a plan for logical, incremental Airport development to serve near-term demand

Objectives:

- Assess on-Airport physical improvements needed over the 20-year master planning period and use this as the basis for a long-term CIP for the Airport.
- Identify off-Airport physical improvements needed and/or programmed over the next 20 years and use this to focus efforts for funding by non-FAA sources.
- Identify appropriate sites for near term hangar development to meet existing demand.
- Within a business and financing plan, identify potential funding sources for land acquisition and development over the 20-year period.

Goal 3: Ensure that the planning process is accessible to the public and involves the various jurisdictions and stakeholders that have interest in the Airport

Objectives:

- Hold a series of committee meetings throughout the project to receive study information and provide feedback to the Study Team.
- Provide briefing materials to the Airport Director for posting on the City’s Airport website.
- Provide a public workshop near the end of the planning process to present the study findings to the community and region.
- Support the City in providing additional briefings to regional employers, business leaders, and others not involved in the Study committees.

Goal 4: Support the City of St. Cloud in capital funding recruitment

Objectives:

- Prepare a financial plan and supporting documentation to help achieve reasonable participation or support from surrounding jurisdictions.

- Maximize federal grants in aid through program coordination with FAA and by providing materials to assist the City of St. Cloud in gaining the support of the Minnesota Congressional Delegation.
- Coordinate funding requirements with MnDOT and provide materials to assist the City of St. Cloud in gaining support from the region's legislative representation.

Goal 5: Identify opportunities and tools for revenue development

Objectives:

- Assess concession and commercial development possibilities for St. Cloud Regional Airport.
- Prepare an airport development plan that will accommodate various types of development including large and small operators.
- Develop business management tools and documentation that would facilitate leasing and major tenant recruitment by the City of St. Cloud.

An important by-product of this Master Plan Study should be increased public awareness of the Airport's needs and its benefits to the region. Through participation in the planning process, regional jurisdictions and stakeholders will better understand the challenges of and need for protection for future growth. The City will be have the tools to respond to opportunities for growth and development – whether it be additional air service or development of tenant facilities – in a logical, focused manner that supports long-term objectives.