The Kansas Airport System

There is a strong relationship between Kansas’ economy and aviation. The state’s system of seven commercial service and 73 general aviation airports, listed in the National Plan of Integrated Airports System (NPIAS), provide the gateway to the nation’s air transportation system and the world’s economy. Airports support the Kansas economy by increased efficiency and productivity for all business activity, including the transportation of passengers for both recreational and business purposes. Airports are important economic catalysts, supporting thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in economic activity. Most of Kansas’ largest employers – both large and small – rely on the state’s aviation system to transport employees, customers, supplies, and products. Kansas’ 80 NPIAS airports serve as the base of operations for a variety of businesses, including airlines, air cargo companies, flight instructors, charters, concessionaries, government entities, and many others. Kansas tourism industry also depends on the state’s system of airports to accommodate thousands of visitors each year.

Study Process

The Kansas Department of Transportation, Division of Aviation, implemented this study through a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) grant, to quantify the economic impact and relationship between the state’s system of airports and the economy. The study follows an approved methodology that has successfully quantified the value of airports and airport systems throughout the United States.

The economic contribution of each NPIAS airport in Kansas was measured in terms of employment, payroll, and output. A comprehensive survey process was used to calculate the direct economic benefits related to on-airport businesses and government agencies, including the indirect benefits associated with visitor-related expenditures. Secondary, or induced, impacts from these airport activities were calculated using economic models specific to Kansas. For example, when an airport employee purchases goods and services, those dollars circulate through the local economy which results in additional economic activity in the region. The total economic impact is the sum of all direct, indirect, and multiplier impacts.

Statewide Impacts

Based on information gathered during the study, approximately 91,000 jobs are attributed to the aviation industry, including 42,000 from Aerospace Manufacturing. These employees receive more than $4.4 billion in total payroll, and generate more than $20.5 billion in total economic activity. In addition, the 80 NPIAS airports in Kansas provide a number of health, welfare, and safety benefits, including aerial agricultural spraying, medical transport and evacuation, emergency response, search and rescue, flight training, law enforcement, wildlife management, military training, search and rescue operations, and education.

Impact Measures

Employment measures the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs related to airport activity including on-airport construction. A part-time employee counts as half a full-time employee.

Payroll measures the total annual wages and benefits paid to all workers whose salaries are directly attributable to airport activity.

Economic Activity (Output) measures the value of goods and services related to airports in Kansas. The output from on-airport business activity is assumed to be the sum of annual gross sales and average annual capital expenditures.
Lawrence Municipal Airport (LWC) is located in eastern Kansas between the Kansas City and Topeka metropolitan areas and is owned and operated by the City of Lawrence. The airport is included in the FAA’s National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS), making it eligible to receive federal monies. Additionally, its role within the Kansas Aviation System Plan is identified as a Regional airport, which is intended to accommodate regional economic activities, connect to state and national economies, and serve all types of general aviation aircraft. LWC’s primary runway, Runway 15/33, is 5,700 feet long and 100 feet wide. The field has on-site weather reporting, and the airport’s primary runway is equipped with an ILS approach. LWC’s fixed base operator, provides aircraft fueling, flight training, charter service, aircraft rental, aircraft maintenance, along with many other aviation services. With the main campus of the University of Kansas in Lawrence, the airport is frequently used by university sports teams and university officials. The school also conducts research at the airport, through the Garrison Flight Research Center. Several aircraft maintenance businesses are located on the airfield including Don’s Diesel, Great Plains, and Gut Works. In addition to aircraft maintenance, Gut Works also designs and fabricates aircraft and aircraft systems. Life Star of Kansas is an air ambulance operator that has been based at the airport since April 2002. The airport supports 65,000 annual operations from various types of activities, such as business transport, emergency medical transport, flight instruction, aerial pipeline inspections, aerial banner towing, law enforcement, medical doctor transport, air cargo, and air shows. LWC is a popular destination for NASCAR race teams and their fans that attend races at the Kansas Speedway, 20 miles east of the airport. The airport also sponsors an aviation open house during the spring and summer that attracts up to 3,000 visitors to the area. In addition to the University of Kansas, other local businesses and schools that use the airport for business purposes include Haskell University, Hy-Vee Foods, Target, Wal-Mart, Kroger, Del Monte, First Management, GF Construction, Campus Quest, Packerware, and Global Com.