DOORWAY BRIEF: WE HAVE EXISTING AVIATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Why You Might Be Here

You may represent a community that already has an airport, heliport, hospital heliport, aviation business, drone operation, or other aviation-related asset and want to understand how those facilities may fit into future aviation opportunities.

In many cases, communities are further along than they realize. Existing aviation infrastructure often provides a foundation for future transportation, economic development, emergency response, logistics, or Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) opportunities.

This doorway is intended to help communities understand existing assets, identify opportunities, and strengthen the foundation for future decision-making.

Start with Existing Assets

Many communities already possess infrastructure that may support future aviation activity.

Examples include:

- Public-use airports
- Private airports
- Hospital heliports
- Public safety heliports
- Utility or industrial aviation facilities
- Agricultural aviation facilities
- Existing drone operations
- Aviation-related businesses
- Emergency medical transportation services

These facilities often include established airspace procedures, emergency response relationships, utility connections, trained personnel, operational experience, and community familiarity with aviation activity.

Communities should begin by understanding what aviation assets already exist and how they are currently used.

Existing Infrastructure Creates Opportunities

Future aviation activity will not always require entirely new facilities.

In some cases, existing airports may support electric aircraft operations, cargo services, infrastructure inspection activities, emergency response missions, or regional air mobility services.

Existing heliports may support future medical transportation capabilities, powered-lift operations, or other emerging aviation services.

Even facilities that are not currently pursuing capital improvements may benefit from understanding how emerging technologies could affect future operations, infrastructure needs, emergency planning, or economic development opportunities.

The first opportunity is often understanding existing assets before pursuing new ones.

Strengthening the Foundation

One of the most valuable investments a community can make is ensuring that existing policies, ordinances, permits, and planning documents remain aligned with community goals and current aviation realities.

Examples may include:

- Reviewing aviation-related definitions.
- Reviewing airport or heliport overlay districts.
- Evaluating conditional use permits.
- Reviewing development agreements.
- Confirming emergency access requirements.
- Reviewing airport compatibility policies.
- Updating emergency response plans.
- Evaluating utility readiness and future electrical needs.

These activities can improve readiness regardless of whether a community ultimately pursues new aviation projects.

Well-maintained policies and procedures help communities evaluate future opportunities more efficiently when they arise.

Modernization and Readiness

Many aviation facilities periodically undergo modernization projects. Examples may include:

- Electrical upgrades
- Pavement improvements
- Lighting improvements
- Communications upgrades
- Emergency access improvements
- Utility coordination

- Facility rehabilitation

Communities may find that future aviation opportunities can be incorporated into existing planning and modernization efforts rather than treated as entirely separate projects.

This approach can reduce cost, improve flexibility, and support long-term planning objectives.

Recommended Next Steps

If your community already has aviation infrastructure, consider reviewing:

Infrastructure, Land Use, and Place

To better understand airports, heliports, vertiports, drone facilities, compatibility planning, and infrastructure considerations.

Governance, Roles, Authority, and Coordination

To understand the responsibilities of local governments, airport sponsors, operators, state agencies, and federal agencies.

Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Guide

To evaluate emergency response planning, facility access, training, and preparedness considerations.

Environmental and Noise Mitigation Strategies

To understand compatibility planning, noise considerations, environmental review, and community expectations.

Economic Development and Readiness

To explore how existing aviation assets may support future economic development opportunities.

Questions to Consider

- What aviation assets already exist in our community?
- How are those assets currently being used?
- Are existing policies and ordinances aligned with community goals?
- Are permit conditions clear, measurable, and practical to administer?
- Are emergency response plans current?
- Are utility systems capable of supporting future modernization?
- Are there opportunities to incorporate aviation considerations into planned capital improvements?

- What transportation, economic development, or public safety opportunities could existing infrastructure support?
- Which sections of the toolkit are most relevant to our situation?

Communities do not need to wait for a proposal or major project to begin preparing. Understanding and strengthening existing aviation assets can improve readiness, flexibility, and decision-making regardless of what future opportunities emerge.