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Airport approves 2016 budget, lays foundation for commercial air service

GARY (September 14, 2015) – On Monday, the Gary/Chicago International Airport Authority Board approved a \$2.9 million operating budget for next year, with no change from 2015. The 2016 budget will be sent to the Common Council for final approval by November 1, 2015.

With all technical outstanding items completed for the Runway Expansion Project- well ahead of the December 31 Federal Aviation Administration deadline- the airport is officially more than 30 percent larger. In anticipation of future commercial service, airport manager AvPORTS is exploring opportunities to bring the airport up to industry standards, which includes evaluating a multitude of best practices to maximize growth.

One of these best practices is an update to the Minimum Standards and ‘rates and charges’ fees at the airport. The airport has not updated its Minimum Standards since they were first adopted in 1991. An analysis of the airports throughout the region, in both Illinois and Indiana, as well as in other comparable metropolitan areas, demonstrated significantly lower fees at Gary/Chicago International Airport compared to other airports. AvPORTS recommended the airport revise its more than 20 year-old Minimum Standards to reflect the current operating environment. The changes would reduce taxpayer subsidy to the airport and contribute to financial self-sufficiency over time.

“As we prime the airport for increased service, we’re taking steps to ensure that the airport is up to standards from an operational standpoint,” said AvPORTS’ chief operating officer Tom Bartlett. “The Gary/Chicago International Airport needs to be a modern airport to accommodate future demands, and that means we need to be more aligned with market-based pricing.”

The airport board has asked staff to provide an inclusion policy on new procurement contracts to allow workforce opportunities for local residents and workforce.

“It has always been a priority of the Airport Authority to ensure jobs for local residents, but I want to be sure the airport is proactively engaged with the local community and preparing them for new opportunities at the airport,” said airport executive director Dan Vicari.

Airport fixed-base operator B. Coleman has been certified as a ‘gateway operator’ for Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA) in Washington, DC. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) requires that passengers on flights to or from DCA must be screened by TSA security screeners. This designation now allows travelers flying out of Gary/Chicago International Airport the option to fly directly to DCA, whereas before they would have had to first land at another designated gateway airport.

“Gary/Chicago International Airport is now one of only three airports in Indiana with clearance to fly to Reagan National Airport,” said B. Coleman vice president Carol Bell. “With this clearance, we can better serve current customers and market the airport to a much larger base of fliers with business in DC.”

The airport is proud to host the Aviation Association of Indiana’s (AAI) upcoming April 2016 quarterly meeting. The AAI’s statewide members represent airport managers, directors, consultants, fixed-base operators, aircraft owners, and pilots.

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