

ENHANCING ACCESS FOR RURAL AREAS

The Illinois Aviation System is one of the largest systems in the United States. The system includes over 80 commercial service and general aviation (GA) facilities. For many rural communities, GA airports act as lifelines for their economies and healthcare. Illinois' airports support the state's rural communities by providing Essential Air Service (EAS), hosting emergency and general aviation services, and connecting rural communities to larger economies.

ESSENTIAL AIR SERVICE IN ILLINOIS AIRPORTS

The United States Department of Transportation (US DOT) EAS program was established to keep small communities connected to the National Air Transportation System with scheduled air service following the Airline Deregulation Act of 1978.¹ Today, the EAS program is responsible for subsidizing air service for 175 communities throughout the United States. EAS is currently offered at three Illinois airports: Decatur Airport (DEC) in Macon County, Quincy Regional Airport – Baldwin Field (UIN) in Adams County, and Veterans Airport of Southern Illinois (MWA) in Williamson County.²

Cape Air and SkyWest are the two airlines that provide EAS in Illinois. Cape Air provides service at UIN and MWA. SkyWest Airlines provides EAS at DEC. SkyWest Airlines began providing EAS at Decatur in February 2020 and is contracted to continue service through January 2025. The airline currently provides 12 nonstop roundtrip connections to Chicago O'Hare International Airport (ORD) weekly. Cape Air provides daily, year-round service between UIN to both ORD and MWA. The airline is contracted to continue providing EAS from MWA through 2023. Collectively, SkyWest and Cape Air employ 30 people at the three airports they serve in Illinois.



EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Illinois airport support the state's rural communities in numerous ways from law enforcement and emergency medical service to agricultural aviation, business aviation, aviation education and training, and aerial imagery.. Law enforcement and emergency medical service providers use GA airports and other aeronautical facilities throughout Illinois to provide critical services to rural areas. The Williamson County Fire Protection District (WCFPD) is stationed and headquartered at MWA. WCFPD provides emergency fire service throughout Williamson County to a population of about 300,000 and handles approximately 300 calls per year. WCFPD responds to structure fires, brush fires, automobile accidents, and hazardous material calls, among other emergencies. WCFPD has 11 employees stationed at MWA. Additionally, the

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Coles-Moultrie County 911 dispatch is located at and operates out of the Coles County Memorial Airport (MTO). The dispatch center employs 23 people who support emergency service and dispatch operations for non-emergencies and emergencies. The 911 dispatch at MTO supports fifteen Fire and EMS Agencies and eight Police agencies in Coles County and Moultrie County.

RURAL AIRPORTS SUPPORTING NATIONAL FOOD DISTRIBUTION

Mount Sterling is home to DOT Foods Headquarters and one of the businesses' 13 distribution centers in the United States. DOT Foods is the largest food service redistribution company in the United States, providing product consolidation and weekly deliveries nationwide. DOT Foods currently partners with 1,000 suppliers to deliver 133,000 products to their 5,500 customers across the United States and Canada. DOT Foods is the airport's primary business customer and tenant. At Mount Sterling Municipal Airport (I63), DOT Foods employs 7 people and supports the company's numerous GA and Corporate flying needs.

ONGOING EFFORTS TO INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY IN RURAL ILLINOIS

In recent years, IDOT has made strides in rehabilitating rural airports and increasing accessibility for the 11.5 percent of the state's population that lives in rural areas. Illinois has been able to increase access to rural airports and support rural airport development by utilizing grant funding for airport improvements and programs. In 2019, Illinois received \$5.8 million in grant funding for terminal and runway rehabilitation at rural airports. In 2020, Illinois received over \$9 million in grant funding to support programming at rural airports. These programs include the purchase of new Snow Removal Equipment (SRE), lighting rehabilitation, and apron rehabilitation. Improvements, such as runway and terminal rehabilitation, and programs, such as the purchase of SRE, enable rural airports to continue to safely and efficiently serve their local communities.

¹ US Department of Transportation, *Essential Air Service*, 2017

² US Department of Transportation, *Current List of Eligible EAS Communities*, 2020

³ Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs Western Illinois University, 2019

⁴ Melina Druga, *Transportation Today*, 2019



SUMMARY

Illinois' airports support the state's rural areas by providing essential air service, supporting emergency medical transport and emergency response organizations, granting access to general aviation services, and by enhancing air access to and from these areas. Illinois' rural airports are a gateway for emergency medical operations, access to urban areas, and connections to other economies and markets.