

# McKinney airport poised to take off?

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Collin County Regional Airport at McKinney will soon get a new runway and control tower. Next on the wish list: commercial passenger service.

Really?

OK, let's be clear. No one envisions another Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport or even a Dallas Love Field. But local officials maintain that limited passenger service is on the near horizon.

"Within the next 10 years, you won't recognize this place," said Ken Wiegand, executive director of Collin County Regional.

Founded in 1979, it was known as McKinney Municipal until four years ago. Then officials changed the name to underscore its regional aspirations, added board members from surrounding towns and upgraded the runway.

Next year, the airport will break ground on a wider \$57 million runway and a \$3 million control tower more than three times as tall as the existing one. State and federal funds will cover most of the cost.

"Once the runway is done, it will make the airport very attractive," County Judge Keith Self said. "I want the airport to be the economic engine it should be."

He believes the airport can lure companies and jobs to Collin County. He also thinks commercial passenger service is inevitable, although he won't speculate on a timeframe.

McKinney City Council member Ray Ricchi said he expects jets to regularly land and depart in five to 10 years, offering service to a few destinations.

"I think some type of regional jet service is our future," Ricchi said.

Collin County's population has increased by more than 50 percent this decade to an estimated 764,500. It's one of the state's most affluent counties, increasing the feasibility of passenger service, officials say.

Naysayers might point out that D/FW and Love Field are less than an hour's drive for most Collin County residents. But proponents counter that air travel from McKinney would be more convenient and less stressful. Fliers could park closer to the terminal and get through security quicker.



JEFFREY PORTER/DMN

**Ivan Moreno** tends to a customer's airplane at the McKinney airport, where more than 200 planes are based.

"Airline travel at major airports is so difficult," Self said.

The airport board hired a consultant two years ago to study the feasibility of passenger service from Collin County Regional. The county's population and demographics justify optimism, according to the report by Jacobs Consultancy of Burlingame, Calif.

It said small, low-cost carriers such as [JetBlue](#), [AirTran](#) Airways and [Virgin America](#) might be interested in the McKinney airport. Still, the report cautioned that the proximity of D/FW, Love Field and Addison Airport could discourage airlines.

Even if passenger service doesn't arrive in the near future, Collin County Regional Airport can prosper with travel by corporations and individuals, officials say. Already, the airport houses a growing number of corporate jets. Hewlett Packard, formerly EDS, keeps two jets there. [Texas Instruments](#) has two.

A total of 210 planes are based at the airport, ranging from small Cessnas to multimillion-dollar jets. A flight school offers pilot training, and a small airline provides charter service. Close to 100,000 takeoffs and landings occur a year.

I visited the airport on a recent weekday afternoon. Wiegand took me into the tower, drove me past several dozen hangars and showed me the site of the new runway.

I tried to envision flying to, say, Houston or Austin from the airport. An appealing proposition, yes. A likelihood?

Time will tell.