

Eight Steps to Building a New Airport With Federal and State Funding

Step 1. Airport Sponsor

To be eligible for public funding, every airport that is proposed to be part of Florida's public airport system must be sponsored by a grant-eligible public agency. A grant-eligible agency is a Florida unit of local government or an authority as defined in Florida law. The airport may be either proposed for construction or an existing airport that is proposed to be purchased by or conveyed to an eligible sponsor. The proposed airport must ultimately be a public use facility to be eligible for federal and state funding. In addition, the airport must be publicly owned to be eligible for state funding.

Step 2. Feasibility Study

A feasibility study is a preliminary planning project that develops basic operational, financial and environmental information and justifies bringing a new or existing airport into the Florida Aviation System Plan (FASP). The feasibility study must show that the proposed airport or site is not constrained from future expansion from both a land use and an airspace perspective and must clearly and factually explain the capital and operating costs that the airport sponsor will assume.

Prior to entry into the FASP and/or the FAA National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS), a feasibility study is the only type of new airport related project that is eligible for funding. A feasibility study is defined in Florida Department of Transportation Procedure No. 725-040-210.

Step 3. FASP and NPIAS

A proposed airport must be included in the Florida Aviation System Plan (FASP) to be eligible for state funding, and in the National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) to be eligible for federal funding. The FASP is Florida's long-range needs plan for aviation facilities. Likewise, the NPIAS is the FAA's long-range national needs plan for aviation facilities

Entry into the FASP is approved by the Florida Department of Transportation Aviation Office. The decision is based on the results of a feasibility study, the concurrence of the proposed airport sponsor, a recommendation from the appropriate regional Continuing Florida Aviation System Planning Process (CFASPP) steering committee and a recommendation from the appropriate Department district office.

Entry into the NPIAS is approved by the FAA Orlando Airports District Office. The decision is influenced by the results of the feasibility study and is based on the proposed role of the new airport in the national aviation system. In cases of marginal justification for a new airport, a FASP recommendation is the basis of entry into the NPIAS.

Step 4. Preliminary Environmental Planning

A proposed new airport may require several environmental studies prior to facility design and construction. A key federal and state requirement is a site selection study. A site selection study examines impacts of the proposed facility on the social and natural environments and possible mitigations to satisfy the requirements of federal and state environmental laws. Alternative sites are examined and compared. The complexity of the site selection study is dependent on the environmental complexity of the proposed area where the airport will be (is) located. In geographic areas of environmental sensitivity, additional environmental studies may be required to supplement the site selection study. The FAA and the U.S. Department of Environmental Protection are the approval agencies for the site selection and related studies.

Further, the State of Florida requires a study of a Development of Regional Impact (DRI). The appropriate regional planning council and the Florida Department of Community Affairs are the approval agencies for the DRI.

Step 5. Facility Planning

Prior to capital funding, each airport sponsor must develop an airport master plan and an airport layout plan. The airport master plan develops detailed near-term and long-range facility needs, justification, cost estimates and construction schedules. The FAA must approve the airport layout plan for federal funding eligibility of the planned capital projects. The Department must approve both the airport master plan and the airport layout plan for funding eligibility.

The financial component of the airport master plan that includes all airport development projects must be prioritized and programmed into the FAA Capital Improvement Program by the FAA Orlando Airports District Office and/or into the Florida Five Year Transportation Work Program by a Department district office prior to funding. Project prioritization and programming is accomplished according to a prescribed cycle each year.

Step 6. Local Government Planning

Prior to proceeding with airport development, the airport sponsor must have the airport master plan incorporated into the local government comprehensive plan. The appropriate metropolitan planning organization and the Florida Department of Community Affairs are the approval agencies for the local government comprehensive plan.

Further, the metropolitan planning organization must include proposed airport development funding needs in their long-range transportation plan and their transportation improvement program.

Step 7. Environmental Impact Analysis

Most new airport proposals will be subject to a detailed environmental impact analysis based on development specified in the airport master plan and the airport layout plan. The environmental analysis will result in any environmental impact statement that will specify the acceptability of the proposed projects and any required environmental mitigations. The U.S. Department of Environmental Protection is the approval agency for the environmental analysis.

Step 8. Airport Development

Finally, engineering design and construction of airport development projects described in the airport master plan and layout plan are accomplished according to the airport master plan schedule, but within the funding constraints of the sponsor, state and federal budgets.

Typically, it requires more than five years to complete these eight steps for a simple general aviation airport. More complex airport configurations or environmentally sensitive sites require more time for development.