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MAC General Aviation Airports See Continued Growth in 2021 Flight Training and Business Travel Recovery Spur 8% Increase over 2020



MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL – The six general aviation airports operated by the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) grew their operations in 2021 by 8% collectively—an increase to 352,195, or 26,151 more takeoffs and landings compared to 2020.

“The strong demand for our general aviation system did not wane over the past year,” said Brian Ryks, CEO of the MAC. “Our general aviation airport system overall has seen double-digit growth in operations from 2019 to 2021, and the total number of aircraft based at our six reliever airports has held steady at more than 1,300. The amount of flight training occurring at our airports is very promising as airlines look to backfill large numbers of vacancies due to pilot retirements and focus on continued growth in demand.”

The MAC’s general aviation airports are referred to as “reliever airports” within the Twin Cities metropolitan area because they relieve congestion that would otherwise impact Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport (MSP), which had [303,850 total operations in 2021](#), a 24% increase over 2020.

Despite the pandemic, MAC reliever airports in 2021 continued to build on the momentum from 2020, when the reliever system posted 2% growth over 2019 activity levels.

“We have seen a resurgence in private business travel and in leisure and educational flights across our system of reliever airports during the past year,” said Joe Harris, director of reliever airports for the MAC. “In 2021, corporations began flying their business jets more often and the demand for flight training programs at our reliever airports has been off the charts. We expect these trends to continue into 2022 as more workers return to the office and pilots continue training at one of the many flight schools located at our relievers.”

St. Paul Downtown Airport (STP) and Airlake Airport (LVN) located in Lakeville, MN, saw the largest increases in total operations in 2021. Takeoffs and landings at STP, which serves more corporate activity than other reliever airports, increased by 29.8%, or more than 9,000 additional operations over 2020. At LVN, which serves primarily leisure flying and flight training, activity increased by 15.8%, or nearly 5,000 more operations in 2021 than 2020.

The only reliever airport to see a decrease in operations in 2021 was Crystal Airport (MIC), located northwest of Minneapolis, where takeoffs and landings dropped by 4.2%, or around 1,600 operations.

The MAC’s remaining three reliever airports—Flying Cloud Airport (FCM) in Eden Prairie, MN; Lake Elmo Airport (21D), located between St. Paul to the west and the St. Croix River to the east; and Anoka County–Blaine (ANE), located just north of Minneapolis and St. Paul—each saw increases in operations ranging from 5–10%.

Airport	2021 Final	2020 Final	2020-2021 Change
21D	32,645	29,799	9.6%
ANE	74,657	70,852	5.4%
FCM	131,593	124,382	5.8%
LVN	36,259	31,314	15.8%
MIC	37,845	39,509	-4.2%
STP	39,196	30,188	29.8%
	352,195	326,044	8.0%

[Click here to view a complete summary of 2021 reliever airport statistics.](#)

The MAC’s reliever airports returned to hosting outdoor, in-person community events in summer 2021. Notable events in 2021 included Flying Cloud Airport’s Girls in Aviation Day and the AirExpo aircraft showcase, as well as the annual Father’s Day pancake breakfast at both Lake Elmo Airport and Crystal Airport.

Continued investments at MAC's reliever airports are planned for 2022. Major improvements continue at Lake Elmo Airport to complete the relocation and extension of Runway 14-32, which will be paved later this year. The new runway will span 3,500 feet and will allow the existing runway to be converted to taxiway. New lighting, signage and other airfield safety improvements are also planned.

The MAC's reliever airport system generates an estimated \$756 million a year for the area economy and supports more than 3,600 jobs.

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About The Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC)

The Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) owns and operates one of the nation's largest airport systems, including [Minneapolis-St Paul International \(MSP\)](#) and six general aviation airports. The MAC's airports connect the region to the world and showcase Minnesota's extraordinary culture to millions of passengers from around the globe who arrive or depart through MAC airports each year. Though a public corporation of the state of Minnesota, the organization is not funded by income or property taxes. Instead, the MAC's operations are funded by rents and fees generated by users of its airports. For more information, visit www.metroairports.org.