

## Reaching Its Capacity, Cherry Capital Airport Eyes Expansion

By Luke Haase | Feb. 3, 2020

Traverse City's Cherry Capital Airport (TVC) is in the very early stages of what is likely to become a significant expansion of its terminal — bringing more gates, passenger waiting areas, parking and amenities. Record traffic numbers have caused the airport to surpass its recommended capacity at times, prompting airport officials to begin the lengthy process of justifying, funding, designing, and constructing an expansion that would be complete in 2026 or 2027.

The expansion is dictated by explosive growth in traffic at Cherry Capital Airport. More year-round residents, visitors, and destination events have helped attract more airline carriers — like Elite Airways and Allegiant Airlines — as well as increases in the number of flights by legacy carriers like Delta, United and American. The final traffic numbers are due any day, but it will either be calendar year 2019 or 2020 when Traverse City's airport surpasses Flint's to become the third busiest airport in Michigan, a position it will probably never lose again.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) recommends studying an airport's future needs when it exceeds "peak hourly capacity" on one time per day, Airport Director Kevin Klein says. During the confluence of the Great Lakes Equestrian Festival, Traverse City Film Festival, and Interlochen Arts Camp in late July/early August, Cherry Capital hit or exceeded that capacity four times in 2017. TVC now routinely exceeds that capacity; Klein says it happens "mid-afternoons almost every Saturday for twelve weeks," when there are 9-12 planes on the ground at any given time.

A three-year Department of Transportation Airport Improvement Program Grant has funded a study and report about the future needs of the airport. "This will help us as we go forward in assessing what our needs are for a future airline terminal and the justification for any expansion," says Klein.

The first phase of that study was an open house facilitated by SEEDS, when attendees were asked to weigh-in on everything from airport processes to recycling on-site to potential building materials. That was followed by surveys that were served up to those who accessed TVC's free wifi service. Those brief online surveys measured interest in specific potential amenities like wireless service, covered parking, self-service kiosks, food and beverage services, and more. Survey respondents said the most important features to them were — in order — being able to use mobile devices even more, from skipping lines to ordering food to having places to charge devices; more variety with food and beverage choices; and updated flight information displays and paging systems.