

Truckee airport services grow with demand

By Carole Jablon-Bernardi

TRUCKEE – Truckee Tahoe Airport District doesn't fall short when living up to its slogan, "Connected by more than a runway."

Between 2012-16, there was a steady uptick in the economy and the airport authority noticed demand became greater. In 2016 the airport had 32,524 flight operations (landings and take offs) which was an increase of 5,000 operations from the previous year. This equates to an average of 89 operations per day, with heaviest aircraft traffic over holiday weekends and heavy tourist periods.

In order to manage this increase, the airport is building 10 "new" executive box hangars to accommodate larger twin engine planes with bigger wing spans. The hangars can't get built fast enough as there is an 11-year wait list of approximately 27 people. Presently, there are 220 hangars.

Building more hangars isn't the only solution to meeting a greater demand. The airport's board realized its first priority was enhancing aviation safety.



Air traffic controllers work at the Truckee airport during the summer months. Photo/Carole Bernardi

Marc Lamb, aviation and community services manager at the airport, is prideful when describing the reasoning behind Truckee's first temporary tower.

"The primary purpose of the new temporary seasonal tower, which started operations June 1, is to enhance aviation safety and to reduce neighborhood overhead flight annoyance. The pilot community feedback that we've been getting to date has been overwhelmingly in favor of the tower at KTRK," Lamb said.

Why a seasonal tower? It's based purely on volume. After setting things in motion back in 2014 with plans and FAA permit approval, KTRK – the call letters for the airport – started working with Midwest ATC based in Kansas. Midwest ATC moved ahead with building a pre-fabricated, modular, custom built military cab which is frequently used for temporary airport tower setups in extreme locations. The interior occupies radio transmission, recorder, automated weather

observing systems, airfield light control, navigational monitoring, airfield surveillance and approach radar, and a complete suite of air traffic controller equipment. It was hoisted onto six shipping containers. A metal stairway leads up to the entrance.

“The idea of using shipping containers to form the main body of the tower, which would house the tower cab was well researched and fulfilled with Midwest ATC. We were assured the structure would meet all stringent building permit code requirements and that it could be erected relatively quickly and fit into our budget constraints,” Lamb told Lake Tahoe News.



The Truckee airport traffic control tower looks like stacked cargo trailers. Photo/Carole Bernardi

The tower is owned outright by the airport. It will be operational from June 1-Sept. 15. The structure will remain standing year round.

Midwest ATC staffs the tower with a floating reservoir of certified FAA air traffic controllers. Staffed with never less than two controllers (one air, one ground), from 7am-9pm; the maximum staff moves up to six controllers during peak hours.

There is a voluntary, but strongly requested flying curfew between 10pm and 7am as part of the airport's good neighbor policy. When the tower ceases to operate come September, it will not be dismantled. The cost of the structure was \$500,000, which included the hiring of FAA controllers. Because the tower is already assembled, the cost to operate next year will be at least half this amount.

In October, staff will report to the airport board and present the metrics based on the success and/or failure of the tower's presence. They will be looking for fewer incursions (range of error) and reduction in noise and annoyance complaints.

Before the temporary tower was built, flight operations were run out of the universal communication viewing bay in the main airport building. Through radio frequency all air traffic control took place. Besides small aircraft flight the airport also deals with the glider operations, sky diving and flight instruction school on the property.

The airport serves 35,000 full-time residents and 60,000 peak period visitors, covers 1,200 acres at an elevation of 5,900 feet above sea level in the Martis Valley region (7 miles north of Lake Tahoe), straddling the Nevada and Placer county lines.

Classified as a general aviation airport (no TSA), it services charter and private aircraft only (less than 30 seats) and no commercial flights. The popularity of member airline travel companies such as Net Jet, Wheels Up, Red Stripe and Surf Air (Surf Air has a reception space in the airport lobby) have shown enormous growth reflecting the demand.

Note:

- The Truckee Tahoe Airport invites the community to come learn about the new temporary tower every Friday from 4-5pm through June. These Q&A opportunities will take place in the administration building.