

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Delta County Airport taking customer service to new heights

ESCANABA, MI May 7, 2014

The Delta County Airport in Escanaba is taking customer service to new heights this year, with installation of a passenger loading bridge. The enclosed gangway will enable passengers to walk from the airport terminal building up a ramp to the door of an aircraft, without having to climb stairs and without being exposed to the elements.

“It’s probably the largest customer service goal that we’ve been able to work on and achieve,” says airport manager Kelly Smith. Having more than 10,000 passenger boardings last year earned the Delta County Airport federal Airport Improvement Program (AIP) funds enough to cover the bridge project and several others also approved by the Federal Aviation Administration. The airport will receive the money in 2015.

Meanwhile, the Delta County Board of Commissioners has agreed to loan the county-owned airport up to \$325,000, effectively from its Residual Equity Fund, to cover the cost of the bridge. “The county has been a very forward-thinking partner with ... the airport,” Smith says. “They know that this is a huge asset to this community.” The loan will be repaid with interest.

Smith says the airport will likely begin soliciting bids for the bridge sometime later this month, as soon as specifications are approved by the Michigan Department of Transportation. Development of those specifications was supervised by Prein&Newhof, in downstate Grand Rapids, which is overseeing the project. Airport consultant and civil engineer Bob Nelesen is the project manager.

Nelesen describes the bridge as a series of five-foot-wide interlocking corridors leading from the ground-level door of the terminal to the gangplank at a jet hatch seven feet above the apron. The longest of the corridors—the one housing the ramp itself—will be motorized and have wheels, enabling an operator to mechanically pivot that section into place from its storage position against the building. He says the ramp’s incline will be even more gradual than the 1:12 (one foot per inch of rise) ratio required by the Americans with Disabilities Act for wheelchairs and scooters.

-more-

As it's designed, the bridge will service all Delta Air Lines' Bombardier CRJ200 regional airliners currently serving the Delta County Airport, and any CRJ700s or CRJ900s that may follow. All can taxi into place, and all their doors start at the same height. Servicing larger aircraft, with doorsills 11 feet above ground, would require the airport to buy extensions to the ramp and a tractor to properly position the planes.

Smith says, "At this time, the airline has a manual [hand-cranked] lift" used to board wheelchair-dependent passengers and others who can't climb stairs. "It works, and it's what we have, but this boarding ramp ... of course, will be handicap friendly."

"People have choices about the airports that they utilize for air service," Nelesen explains. "So, if you can provide a better customer experience, you will tend to attract more ... customers that are willing to utilize your facility." And, according to Smith, more customers "equates to" more AIP funds for the airport for other similar projects.

Once bidding is complete and a vendor chosen, installation of the passenger loading bridge is expected to follow within about four months. Nelesen says that involves little more than assembling the prefabricated product on site and training the operators. Smith adds that the federal Transportation Security Administration office serving the airport supported modifying the door to the terminal, "strengthening the security profile in the checkpoint/sterile area."

She says, "I'm looking at the end of September, real early October to have the first usage and the first flight out [afterwards]. The bad, snowy weather, winter rain, fall rain—hopefully, they'll all be under cover."

END

605 words

Contact:
Nora Viau, Director of Administration and Finance
County of Delta
310 Ludington St., Room 222
Escanaba, MI 49829-4057
906-789-5100
nora@deltacountymi.org

Delta County Airport facts

- The Delta County Airport in Escanaba, Michigan, is served by Delta Air Lines' Delta Connection.
- Delta Connection flights leave Escanaba for the Detroit Metro Airport at 6 a.m. daily and 1:55 p.m. weekdays.
- Delta Air Lines' Bombardier CRJ200 regional airliners seat 50 passengers each, with two seats on either side of the aisle, except in the very last row.
- The number of passengers boarding commercial flights at the Delta County Airport in 2013 approached 15,000, the highest number since 2001.
- Exceeding 10,000 enplanements in a year entitles the Delta County Airport to at least \$1 million from the Federal Aviation Administration Airport Improvement Program; fewer than 10,000 entitles it to no more than \$150,000.
- Among other things, the Delta County Airport features free parking, a covered entrance to the terminal building, and a restroom inside the secured area of the terminal.
- The Michigan Department of Transportation Bureau of Aeronautics' most recent Community Benefit Assessment determined that the Delta County Airport indirectly contributes more than \$38 million a year to the local economy.