

Birchwood Airport Master Plan (AMP) Update

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The Airport Master Plan (AMP) Update Process

How has the 2005 Plan been used? What recommendations have been implemented?

The 2005 Birchwood Airport Master Plan (AMP) identifies projects to be brought to the Aviation Project Evaluation Board (APEB), where Birchwood projects compete against proposed projects at other Alaska airports.

- Through the APEB, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) evaluates and scores projects at state-owned airports throughout the state.
- Emphasis is placed on airports that do not have road access.
- DOT&PF is obligated to provide access to all Alaska communities.
- Communities with no road access/that are reliant on year-round airport are more likely to receive a portion of the limited funding.
- Projects identified in the 2005 AMP were scored but did not receive a high enough score to move forward into design.

What is the benefit of an Airport Master Plan (AMP)?

An AMP provides an inventory of airport assets and services to airport users and the public. It is a long-range planning document that guides how the airport will function and respond to projected change over the next 20 years. An AMP update is an opportunity for users and other stakeholders to confirm the vision and goals for an airport and surrounding area, and to document needed improvements and additional services to meet that vision. An updated AMP also better positions the airport for competitive funding designated for airport improvements. AMPs are typically updated every 10 to 20 years but can be updated sooner to address specific issues or changes.

Will the Airport Master Plan include both short and long-term objectives?

Yes, the Master Plan update will include a range of measures and objectives. Some will be implemented immediately, within the next five years, and some will be phased in or receive continued consideration through the life of the plan (over the next 20 years).

What is a Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) and how were members selected?

The SAG is comprised of pilots, major landowners, managers, and other key stakeholders who agreed to participate throughout the life of the AMP update and are directly impacted by current airport services and any changes to service. The SAG reviews various findings and recommendations from the planning effort, provides input, and generally serves in an advisory role to the project team. The SAG also offers guidance and input into the public involvement effort to help identify, shape, and share outreach opportunities, such as public meetings and online forums.

To select SAG members, entities representing stakeholders directly impacted by current or any proposed changes to airport facilities and services were identified first. The project team then consulted with entity leadership to identify specific individuals to represent their stakeholder group. The project team sent email invitations, followed by one-on-one phone calls to potential members. The preliminary list of entities and

individual stakeholders was shared and further fleshed out by the project Spring 2022 SAG and public meetings.

Birchwood AMP SAG Members

- Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (local members)
- Alaska Railroad
- Birchwood Airport Association
- Birchwood Civil Air Patrol
- Birchwood Community Council
- Birchwood Recreation and Shooting Park
- DOT & PF
- Eklutna, Inc.
- Native Village of Eklutna
- Talon Hangar Condominium Association

Why is DOT&PF exploring third party management of the Birchwood Airport?

Like the assessment of potential layout and infrastructure improvements portions of the AMP update, DOT&PF is also assessing potential third-party management of the airport to explore options for how best to meet the needs of airport users. The assessment will examine if and how different management scenarios can address the vision and goals for the Birchwood Airport.

Has a public-private partnership model been successfully applied at a comparable Alaska airport?

This question will be explored as a part of the Public-Private Partnership Analysis portion of the AMP update.

Current Funding, Operations & Maintenance

What are Birchwood Airport's main sources of revenue and expenses? Is the Airport profitable? How does Birchwood Airport's operation and maintenance costs compare with other Alaska airports?

NOTE: Please see the Birchwood AMP Financial Assessment (May 2021) on [the project website](#), under "Project Documents" for additional detail.

As part of this AMP update, Northern Economics, Inc. completed a financial assessment of the Birchwood Airport. The assessment considers financial information between 2015 and 2020, including airport operations, revenue and expenses, and compares Birchwood operations and financials to two similar regional Alaska airports: Wasilla and Soldotna. While there is no perfect comparison for the Birchwood Airport, these facilities were chosen due to size and regional similarities.

Operations: Compared to the Wasilla and Soldotna airports, Birchwood has more aircraft but far fewer total operations per year. In 2020, Birchwood had 308 aircraft, compared to 169 at Soldotna and 168 at Wasilla. Birchwood had 10,259 operations, Soldotna has 21,100 and Wasilla had 42,660. The overall operating cost per based aircraft at Birchwood is 54% that of Soldotna and 37% that of Wasilla.

Revenue: The assessment found 70% of Birchwood Airport revenues in 2020 came from lease fees, 25% came from tie-downs and parking, 3% came from processing fees, 2% came from fuel and less than 1% came

from interest and late fees. Revenue has grown significantly (36.5%) since 2017, which is largely due to lease fees.

Expenses: In 2020, Birchwood’s costs for wages amounted to \$27,709, services and charges amounted to \$10,715, supplies amounted to \$5,430, and \$103,355 are classified as “other” costs in the Northern Economics assessment. “Other” expenses are primarily capital (\$25,207) and facilities (\$78,148) expenses. Wages in 2020 were far less than the comparable airports, with Wasilla spending \$80,605 on wages and Soldotna spending \$105,712.

Profitability: The financial assessment found the Birchwood Airport is profitable and has been for the past six years, however the Birchwood Airport does not have dedicated personnel. In 2020, the airport had an operating profit of \$126,623. The largest profit year in the assessment was 2019, with an operational profit of \$161,317. The lowest was \$66,430 in 2017. See *“Where does Birchwood Airport revenue go?”* for related details.

Where does Birchwood Airport revenue go?

Birchwood Airport revenue, like all revenue from DOT&PF airports, goes into a general aviation fund which helps fund maintenance and operations at all DOT&PF airports. DOT&PF is required to provide access to all Alaska communities, and airport maintenance is prioritized in communities off the road system, which more heavily rely on air travel.

Who owns and maintains the Pilot Briefing Facility?

The Pilot Briefing Facility is owned by DOT&PF. The facility was initially built with funds allocated by the Alaska legislature. While DOT&PF funds utilities (electric, water and septic) Birchwood Airport Association (BAA) has direct access to and use of the facility and has invested in some upkeep of the unit.

Changes/Improvements to Current Operations & Maintenance

Is DOT&PF considering additional electrical outlets at tie-downs as part of the AMP Update?

During the AMP update outreach process, many airport users have shared a request for more electric outlets at tie-downs. The feasibility of that addition is being considered as part of the AMP update.

What are the implications of the gravel runway not being compliant with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulatory requirements?

Taxiway A is located in-line with both Runway 02R/20L thresholds. In-line taxiways are not permitted under the current requirements of [FAA Advisory Circular \(AC\) 150/5300-13A, Section 416](#). The runway is 50 feet wide and does not meet the 60-foot FAA standard for A-I (Utility) runways. Also, the runway’s current location does not meet FAA’s requirement for 700-foot separation between parallel runways.

To be eligible for FAA’s Airport Improvement Program (AIP) for capital project funding, airport infrastructure must meet FAA requirements. DOT&PF Maintenance and Operations will continue to maintain the runway, but without FAA AIP funding, maintenance dollars will come from general funds, potentially impacting the frequency and robustness of ongoing maintenance of the gravel runway.

What are the intended future uses of adjacent landowners?

The largest adjacent landowner is Eklutna, Inc., which owns 117 acres to the south of the airport and 80 acres to the north. As adjacent neighbors, Eklutna Inc. representatives (also a SAG member) are open to expansion of the Birchwood Airport. This would likely require DOT&PF purchase or lease Eklutna Inc. land. The 117

acres to the south are zoned to allow for expansion of hangar space, which is a need voiced by pilots. Eklutna Inc. stated they did not have any plans for the 80 acres to the north.

The Birchwood Recreation and Shooting Park is also on adjacent land. Park representatives (also a SAG member) do not have significant plans to change land use in the future. Any planned improvements to the existing shooting range are within the park's current footprint.