

READING REGIONAL AIRPORT

Reading Regional Airport: Soaring to New Heights as the Sole Fixed Base Operator

Since becoming the sole Fixed Base Operator (FBO) in January 2024, the Reading Regional Airport Authority (RRAA) has made significant strides in improving airport operations, facilities, and services. This transition has introduced a wave of positive changes, setting new standards for transparency, pricing, safety, and customer service. A Fixed Base Operator is a business that provides a variety of essential general aviation services at an airport. Some services might include fueling, maintenance, hanger rental, ground handling, and passenger and crew service.

The Reading Regional Airport historically has been served by multiple FBOs over the decades, each leasing operation rights and physical space from the airport. For the airport to develop portions of their land or make other capital improvements on the airport grounds, it would need to work with, and in many instances, get permission from, FBOs whose business goals might not align with those of the airport or the county. For decades, this lack of flexibility and control over its own physical space inhibited significant airport development and business partnerships.

“In 2023, an opportunity arose where the airport’s existing Fixed Base Operator businesses offered to be bought out, allowing the airport to manage its own FBO,” said Berks County Commissioner Christian Leinbach. “For the first time in decades, the airport could make long-term decisions directly without the need for approval from outside businesses. The Reading Regional Airport and its FBO, Reading Aviation, have made several bold strides in the last nine months.”

Leinbach explained that purchasing the former FBOs came after a period of due diligence, reviewing budgets, reassessing facilities, and contracting with an outside, advising agency with long experience in aviation. Armed with the results of that diligence, the RRAA recognized that the opportunity to reclaim authority over services and operations at the Reading Airport was well worth the expense to purchase the former FBOs.

Transparency and Accountability

One of the most notable changes under RRAA's leadership is the commitment to transparency. All actions and decisions are made publicly, allowing tenants and stakeholders to actively participate and provide input. Policies, rates, and a comprehensive list of services are now easily accessible on the airport’s website, ensuring that users are well-informed and that the airport operates with accountability. This open approach fosters a collaborative environment, allowing tenants to voice concerns and contribute to the airport's ongoing development.

“From a bottom-line perspective, Reading Aviation, the Fixed Base Operator, cleared \$747,699 in 2024 in total operating income - revenue over expenses. It is important to note that this is over nine months versus a full year. This is due to the acquisition only being completed the beginning

READING REGIONAL AIRPORT

of January, 2024. The airport itself, excluding the FBO, made \$50,000 in 2024,” said Reading Regional Airport Director Zackary Tempesco.

Fair, Uniform Pricing

RRAA has also introduced uniform pricing structures to promote fairness and consistency. Historically, hangar rents at the airport ranged widely, leading to discrepancies among users. The new standardized rates are now based on aircraft engine type, creating an equitable system that ensures all users are treated fairly. This approach has been well received by tenants who previously faced a confusing and uneven pricing model.

Fuel pricing has seen a remarkable transformation as well. Once ranked among the highest in the region, the airport’s fuel rates are now in the lowest third within a 100-nautical-mile radius. This competitive pricing not only attracts more aircraft operators but also enhances the airport’s reputation as a cost-effective destination, boosting overall activity and economic impact.

Investing in Facilities and Equipment

RRAA has committed significant resources to upgrading airport facilities and equipment, addressing maintenance issues that had long been neglected. Investments have been made in essential projects such as fuel farm upgrades, hangar maintenance, roof repairs, and HVAC system improvements. These enhancements not only improve operational efficiency but also ensure a better experience for airport users. Almost none of this could have happened before creating Reading Aviation as the sole FBO.

“The improved facilities make a strong first impression on businesses and visitors, presenting the airport as a well-maintained and professional hub,” Tempesco said. “This fresh impact is crucial as the airport continues to position itself as a key entry point to the community, attracting new business opportunities and increasing economic activity.”

Alignment and Professionalism

The consolidation of FBO services under RRAA has brought about a fresh sense of alignment and forward progress that had been lacking for decades. Standardized procedures, implemented across all operations, have raised the level of service and consistency at the airport. From aircraft services to fueling operations, these standards ensure that the airport meets the highest levels of industry expectations.

Focus on Safety and Quality

Safety has been a top priority for RRAA, with significant investments in equipment upgrades and procedural enhancements. The implementation of standardized fueling procedures has not only increased safety but also improved fuel quality to the highest recognized standard, ATA103, which is typically reserved for airlines. By meeting these rigorous standards, Reading Regional Airport assures operators of a safe and reliable experience every time.

READING REGIONAL AIRPORT

Enhanced Customer Service

RRAA's commitment to customer service is evident through its investment in staff training and the introduction of premium services. Employees are sent to specialized training programs for aircraft services and undergo standardized training for fueling operations. This focus on skill development has elevated the quality of service, providing a professional and welcoming experience for all visitors. The addition of red-carpet services further enhances the customer experience, adding a touch of elegance and hospitality that sets the airport further apart from competitors.

Economic Impact and Future Development

"It's easy to forget that the airport is a self-funding entity. The costs for mergers, capital development, business partnerships, all of what is happening at the Reading Airport is paid for by fees, grants, and state and federal dollars," Tempesco said. "Nothing comes directly from local taxpayers."

The changes implemented by RRAA in the last nine months are not just about immediate improvements; they are laying the groundwork for increased development activity and economic impact in the community. With a renewed sense of direction and a focus on quality, the airport is poised to attract more business, drive tourism, and contribute significantly to the local economy. The ongoing investments and improvements signal a bright future for Reading Regional Airport as a key player in regional growth and development.

The ability for the Reading Regional Airport to chart its own flightpath into the future is priceless. Perhaps for the first time, the airport, a Fixed Base Operator, and local government all have common goals aligned with the best outcomes for the airport and Berks County.