

Is the McKinney Airport Expansion a “Done Deal?”

The McKinney City Council held a private, almost secret groundbreaking for a passenger terminal and associated infrastructure at McKinney National (TKI) on July 18, 2025, and contractors have started moving dirt on the proposed site. So, the McKinney City officials and their Public Relations Department want you to believe that passenger service at TKI is a “done deal.” But is it?

Here are some facts.

1. McKinney has not received an FAA Airport Operating Certificate for passenger service. U.S. airports, serving certain air carrier operations, are required to be certified by the FAA under 14 CFR Part 139, Certification of Airports (Part 139). The FAA issues Airport Operating Certificates to allow airport operators to serve the following air carrier passenger operations:

- Scheduled passenger-carrying operations of an air carrier operating aircraft with more than 9 seats (with some exceptions for airports in the State of Alaska); and
- Unscheduled passenger-carrying operations of an air carrier operating aircraft with at least 31 passenger seats.

The FAA issues Airport Operating Certificates to airports that comply with safety and emergency response requirements specified in Part 139. Such requirements cover a wide range of issues, including signs, lights and markings, runway safety, aircraft rescue and firefighting, aviation fueling safety, snow and ice control, and wildlife hazard management.

The city of McKinney has submitted a Letter of Intent for Form 139 Certification from the FAA. Approval of that certificate is pending. One item required for approval is a valid Environmental Assessment. The validity of the April 21, 2025, Environmental Assessment by the City of McKinney and TxDOT is currently being challenged in the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in Washington, DC, by the North Texas Conservation Association (NTCA).

2. The City of McKinney has submitted a draft Letter of Interest for a \$30 M loan from the US Department of Transportation for a new passenger terminal at TKI. The draft Letter of Interest for the loan is not complete, pending approval from other federal agencies. One such approval is from the FAA regarding a valid Environmental Assessment.
3. The City of McKinney has named 3 attorneys from the Boston law firm of Anderson Kreiger LLP, to represent the City in the NTCA case. These are not inexpensive attorneys. Because the federal court could delay or stop the TKI passenger terminal

expansion project, McKinney is spending a large amount for legal representation to fight the NTCA petition in federal court.

4. A contract with an airline has not been announced. A letter of Intent with Avelo Airlines was released; but currently, McKinney has not informed the public about a contract with an airline to provide passenger service at TKI. It will be interesting to see what payments will be guaranteed to the airline by McKinney, when a contract is signed and made available to the public.

At present, contractors are proceeding at the City's expense but final approvals from the FAA have not happened and are being challenged in federal court.

Status of North Texas Conservation Association vs. Texas Department of Transportation, City of McKinney, Texas, and Federal Aviation Administration, Case No. 25-1135, U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit

On May 26, 2025, NTCA filed a petition with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, challenging the Final Environmental Assessment and the FAA's Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the proposed McKinney terminal project.

NTCA argues the project's environmental assessment violates the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and fails to account for critical factors, such as properly assessing an alternative airport for passenger service and including the nearby highway expansion project (Spur 399) that will directly impact emissions, traffic, and air quality in the DFW Ozone Nonattainment Zone.

On July 11, 2025, the FAA and the City of McKinney filed motions to dismiss. NTCA's legal team will continue pressing the case, with responses due on the motions to dismiss by July 31, 2025.

Is there a Better Alternative for Passenger Service in North Texas?

In one word, "**Yes.**" Consider the following comparisons of the North Texas Regional Airport (NTRA) in Grayson County and McKinney National Airport (TKI).

NTRA:

- NTRA is not located in the DFW Ozone Nonattainment Zone. So, passenger jet aircraft at NTRA and vehicles traveling to NTRA will contribute less pollution to the DFW Ozone Nonattainment Zone. Only a portion of the pollution from vehicles traveling out

of Collin and Denton Counties to NTRA will occur in the Nonattainment Zone. All the aircraft pollution at NTRA will be outside the Nonattainment Zone.

- NTRA has established land-use zoning for the approaches to the airport. These land-use zones restrict population densities and provide environmental protection in these Zones.
- The closest environmentally sensitive wildlife area to NTRA is Hagerman National Wildlife Reserve, approximately 3.7 miles East of the NTRA runway.
- NTRA is ideally located on 1,410 acres in rural areas of Grayson County.
- TKI is located near the proposed North Dallas Tollway extension and in the future growth areas of Northern Collin County and Grayson County.
- NTRA's current 9,000 ft runway can accommodate passenger jet aircraft as well as full payload, extended range passenger jet aircraft. The runway can be extended 1,000 ft to the North and 1,000 ft to the South on existing airport property if necessary.
- To be certified for passenger service, NTRA will have to upgrade some taxiways and add a passenger terminal, parking, and other infrastructure.

TKI:

- TKI is located in the DFW Ozone Nonattainment Zone. So, passenger jet aircraft at TKI and vehicles traveling to TKI will contribute to pollution levels in this Zone.
- TKI has no restrictive environmental zoning in place for the approaches to the airport. The North approach (from US 380 to the runway) is zoned AP (Airport) and PD (Planned Development – Light Manufacturing). The South approach has Light Industrial and Planned Development- Light Manufacturing zoning within McKinney city limits. The South approach in the Town of Fairview is zoned Residential.
- The closest environmentally sensitive wildlife reserve to TKI is the Heard Natural Science Museum and Wildlife Sanctuary, 0.9 miles from the South end of TKI's extended runway.
- TKI is located on 745 acres near existing residential neighborhoods in East McKinney and Fairview. It is not located in or near the future growth areas of North Collin County and Grayson County.
- Traffic access via FM 546 to TKI is congested and the future expansion of Spur 399 will not be completed any time soon.
- With the current lengthening of its runway to 8,002 ft, TKI will be able to accommodate regional passenger jet aircraft but not full payload, extended range passenger jet aircraft. The runway cannot be extended to the South and is limited for further expansion to the North.
- To be certified for passenger service, TKI will have to upgrade some taxiways and add a passenger terminal, parking, and other infrastructure.