

PREMIUM NORTH MISSISSIPPI

Olive Branch Airport gets more than \$5M in funding

By Rob Moore, Daily Memphian

Updated: May 16, 2024 6:14 AM CT | Published: May 15, 2024 1:10 PM CT



Olive Branch Airport, with a runway length of 6,000 feet, is one of Mississippi's most active airports for landings and takeoffs. (The Daily Memphian file)

The Olive Branch Airport received more than \$5 million in state and federal funding this year, welcome news for a facility with expansion goals so lofty that some officials say it will be unrecognizable in a few years.

“Over the course of the next three to four years or so, the airport’s going to be almost completely remodeled, even if it’s in phases,” said David Taylor Jr., the airport’s manager. “When it’s all completed, it’s going to be almost like a brand new airport.”

Most of that funding — \$3.5 million — was awarded by the city's congressional delegates to make improvements to the facility's aprons, or the concrete surfaces where aircraft are parked, loaded and unloaded, refueled and boarded.

Olive Branch Airport awarded \$500K for rehabilitation

An additional \$1 million, appropriated by the Mississippi Legislature, will go toward renovating the airport's terminal and a \$700,000 grant from the Federal Aviation Administration will help refurbish its control tower.

"We're doing a complete renovation of the terminal building and the hangars, which will include the exterior painting of the building and some remodeling of the interior," Taylor said.

The airport's terminal first opened in 1991. The Olive Branch Airport is the only airport in a rapidly growing DeSoto County.

"It's been repainted and remodeled a few times since then, but it's 2024," Taylor said. "It's time to do it again."

Taylor hopes that by modernizing the facility, more customers will want to build new hangars at the airport. The facility recently opened ground leases for hangar buildouts for the first time in more than 20 years.



That deal became the largest-ever private-to-public airport acquisition facilitated by the FAA. (Patrick Lantrip/The Daily Memphian file)

“We’ve got a lot of people that are interested in moving to the airport, both businesses and private, to build hangars and operate from our field,” Taylor said.

Olive Branch Mayor Ken Adams said the airport currently has 137 private aircraft with a waiting list of more than 60 operations and pilots eager for hangar space.

Under the new lease agreements, private operators or businesses build their own hangars at the airport. After 25 years, the ownership of that hangar reverts to the City of Olive Branch, which then charges the operator reduced rent.

Using recent projects as examples, it costs about \$1.5 million to build a hangar that can house around five aircraft.

“When people have private hangars with us, it increases our rent revenue, but it also increases our fuel sales because if you hangar with us, odds are you’re going to fuel with us, too,” Adams said.

Flight school offers financial pathways to diversify airline industry

Now, the city is in talks with multiple private-jet companies that are interested in the idea of moving at least some of their operations to the Olive Branch Airport.

“Corporate pilots like to fly out of Olive Branch,” Taylor said. “When corporate pilots are happy, they make corporate executives happy, and sometimes that leads to corporations relocating their headquarters to Olive Branch.”

Adams said as the Olive Branch Airport continues to grow, it will become even better positioned to rival Memphis International Airport.

“It’s generally quicker than flying out of Memphis,” Adams said, “and they tell us they feel a higher sense of safety and security in Olive Branch because of the lower crime rate.”

The City of Olive Branch bought the privately owned facility in 2018, thanks largely to a nearly \$15 million grant from the FAA.

Olive Branch Airport awarded \$2.74 million in federal grants for improvements

That deal became the largest-ever private-to-public airport acquisition facilitated by the FAA.

In 2023, the airport saw 109,000 activities, including takeoffs and landings.

“It’s always been primed to reach its full potential,” Taylor said. “The primary vision we have for moving forward is expanding the airport.”

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