

**Andrew Gash**

You're about to discover more than you ever knew about our very own Lakeland Linder International Airport. Let's get focused. I'm Andrew Gash with the communications department for the city of Lakeland. Today we focus on Lakeland Linder International Airport and chat with airport Assistant Director Adam Lunn. Adam, thank you for joining us today.

**Adam Lunn**

Hey, Andrew, thank you for having us on today.

**Andrew Gash**

And to you, our listeners, I know that you're going to be just as impressed and amazed as I am when you hear all about what goes on here at LAL. Lakeland Linder International Airport is one of the most dynamic and diversified airports in the country. I mean, it's currently host to over 60 businesses, right?

**Adam Lunn**

That's correct. Over 65 businesses are here.

**Andrew Gash**

Right. And they call this airport their home. That includes the NOAA hurricane hunters. Right? Which, it's easier to say NOAA than National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

**Adam Lunn**

Yes, absolutely.

**Andrew Gash**

I had to look that up the first time I saw it. The Department of Defense contractor Draken. Right?

**Adam Lunn**

Draken International.

**Andrew Gash**

They call this their home or one of their homes.

**Adam Lunn**

We are, in fact, we are their headquarters.

**Andrew Gash**

Amazing. And then, of course, everyone knows Amazon Air.

**Adam Lunn**

Yes

**Andrew Gash**

This is a big hub for Amazon, and that's probably one of the only things that some people know about Lakeland Linder, is Amazon. But as I'm sure you all will soon discover as you listen, Amazon is just a small part of what happens here. There's flight schools training the next generation of pilots. And Adam, I've just mentioned a few of these things. That's more than I knew before speaking with you a few weeks ago as we were getting ready to focus on the airport during the month of March. I was in this camp of people who imagined that the airport doesn't do anything except for act as my personal landing zone for Amazon binging. And that's it. But there is a lot more than that. I didn't know until you gave us a tour just exactly how big the airport is. 1700 acres. Over 1700 acres.

**Adam Lunn**

Over 1700 acres. Yes, sir.

**Andrew Gash**

It's bigger than all the Disney theme parks put together.

**Adam Lunn**

Yes, sir.

**Andrew Gash**

And many of you may be surprised not just at the size of the land, but also the number of operations. So, Adam, first of all, just... This is the economic engine of Lakeland. What does that mean? How exactly big is this airport and what are you all doing here?

**Adam Lunn**

Absolutely. So we've talked about the actual size of the facility being over 1700 acres. We've talked about our 65 plus businesses and organizations that call this airport home. But more importantly, it's the 3,000

jobs that are located here on the airport. And that's not people working directly for the airport or the City of Lakeland. That's 3,000 jobs that our tenants and businesses are creating for folks right here in our backyard. And one thing that we like to kind of highlight that kind of shows those metrics of where we're at: just a few years ago, we were sitting right around, I think it was \$574 million in economic impact. We are now at over \$1.5 billion in economic impact being generated right here by this facility.

**Andrew Gash**

\$1.5 billion. And Amazon, you told me a few weeks ago, Amazon is just, what, 7% of the traffic here? Not maybe the economic impact, but traffic here.

**Adam Lunn**

Right. Correct. So from an air traffic perspective, Amazon only makes up about 7% of our total operations. In fact, we were over 143,000 operations here last year. That ranks us the 108th busiest airport in the United States.

**Andrew Gash**

108th in the United States. And in Florida, what is that number? 50? No, 30. What is it?

**Adam Lunn**

In Florida? We are the 25th busiest airport in Florida, and a lot of that's due to the flight training activity in the state. So there's a lot of busy airports here with all the flight training activity. To kind of put it in perspective, to kind of compare us to our neighbors over there to the west, Tampa International is the 42nd busiest airport in the United States, and we're sitting at 108.

**Andrew Gash**

There's a history here to this airport. This is not Lakeland's first airport, is that correct? So tell me, what is the history of aviation in Lakeland, and where does Lakeland Linder come into play?

**Adam Lunn**

Sure. Lakeland had a couple of airports before Lakeland Linder International existed. Some were grass fields located in the south and to the west of the city. But I think the first true real airport, what one could say would be a modern airport, would be up at Tigertown, up at Joker Merchant Stadium, where that is in that location today. And in the 1940s, that's when the city commission passed a resolution to replace that existing airport. It was a smaller facility and they were looking to expand. You had the emergence of commercial air travel at that time. And so the city was looking for another location. And so they picked this area to the southwest of the city.

And at that time, of course, World War II was just getting started, and the city leased this facility out to the War Department. And the War Department came in, put in three runways, put in taxiways, support facilities, everything you need to train Army Air Corps personnel during World War II. And then after the war, they returned it back to the city in its condition, in its improved condition. And then slowly the city phased out Lodwick Field, which is up there at Tiger Town today.

### **Andrew Gash**

So this has not always been, of course, Lakeland Linder International. That name has evolved as the airport has evolved. Right? So international travel, that designation was just added in 2019? 18?

### **Adam Lunn**

2017. We added the international capabilities here. And that was when we went in and opened up a new, what's called a general aviation facility. So this is a facility where we can clear aircraft up to 19 passengers. And just last year, we saw over 200 international arrivals coming clear here into the United States here in Lakeland. So that international designation - we've been very proud of and have been working hard to continue to grow the awareness of it. And pilots and corporations are starting to learn that they can come here and clear. And so we're seeing an uptick in those folks utilizing that service.

### **Andrew Gash**

All the warehouses in Lakeland that are cropping up, does that have anything to do with the fact that businesses can call this a hub in central Florida?

### **Adam Lunn**

Yes. In fact, there is one company that moved to Lakeland recently that part of their decision-making process was due to this airport and the ability for their CEOs to come and clear internationally here in Lakeland. It is an international-based company. They're based in Spain, I believe. And that was one of the factors in them choosing to come to Lakeland was the fact that they had that capability here.

### **Andrew Gash**

It's surprising when I hear the amount of inbound and outbound traffic to know that the airport is run by under 25 employees. I mean, 3000 jobs on the property. But as far as those who work for the city, for the airport, kind of being the maintainers of this operation, under 25. So what is your role on this team? How do you keep everything and everyone on track?

### **Adam Lunn**

Sure, so my role on the team is the Assistant Airport Director, and I'm focused on the operational side of the house, as it were. So I'm focused on aircraft operations, emergency response, maintenance of the

facilities and things like that. And we have an outstanding team here at the airport. I can't speak highly enough of them. And it's really a team effort to get this done. It is a lot of facilities, we have over 2 million square feet of facilities under roof, plus the 1700 acres that we're all working to maintain. And that's divided between our maintenance team, our facilities team, and our operations team as well. Plus all of our admin folks that are here helping us with all the day to day back end work to make sure that everything's moving smoothly.

### **Andrew Gash**

One of the things that we were asking about earlier, as we were looking at focusing on the airport for the month of March was a particular job. We asked if there's anything, any function in your department that might be a surprise to the public, and your answer was the position of Airport Operation Specialist. So why was that your particular focus? Tell me more about that.

### **Adam Lunn**

Yeah, I think that was a focus because it's kind of unique. And in that job title itself, it doesn't necessarily give you a lot of background on what that individual actually does. In our Operations Specialists, they are here to help us on a day-to-day basis with safety and security. That's really what it boils down to, including responding to emergencies, assisting with special events, assisting with VIP movements... These folks are out there doing everything from wildlife management to inspections on the runways and taxiways, even to responding to aircraft emergencies and assisting with that as well.

So it's such a diversified job and you wear so many different hats in that position. It's just kind of a really unique role. I think a lot of people can associate to a facility's maintenance position or an accounting position. But that in and of itself, an operations specialist is kind of unique in the world.

### **Andrew Gash**

And for those of you who are listening, you're probably like me in the sense that all you know about an airport is what you see or what you've experienced when you've gone and you've flown somewhere. This airport, not only because it focuses in the moment more on commercial than on passenger travel, but just the very fact that you've given me the behind-the-scenes tour lets me see just how much goes into maintaining this property that has nothing to do with the flights taking off and landing. How early does your team get started every day maintaining this property and getting ready for the arrivals and departures?

### **Adam Lunn**

Yeah, so we are a 24-hour facility. So from city personnel, we do have an Airport Operations Specialist that's working 24 hours a day that's here to respond to any emergencies at any time or any needs of our tenants or operators and users. We also have the 24-hour air traffic control tower. So air traffic control is

working 24 hours a day. Now, those are our federal contract controllers, so they're not direct city employees. And then, of course, we have our partners with the Lakeland Fire Department here providing aircraft rescue firefighting services 24 hours a day as well in the field.

### **Andrew Gash**

As far as job opportunities are concerned, or even those listening who may be younger or even students who are interested in gaining their pilot's license. There's a lot more to an airport than just becoming a pilot. You told me that, again, a few weeks ago.

### **Adam Lunn**

Yeah, I think a lot of people - and I fall in that category - when I was younger, you kind of think there's pilots and there's mechanics, right? And it was actually a job shadow that I did right here at this airport when I was in middle school with the, at the time, the assistant Airport Director, and it kind of opened my eyes to this whole other world of opportunities for me to pursue. And that's kind of where I fell in love with the idea of getting into aviation management and getting into airport management.

But it takes everybody! It's a team effort, from marketing support to accounting to finance to maintenance to your administrators. It takes everybody working together to make sure that this operation runs smoothly and safely. And so for folks looking to get into aviation: you don't have to be a pilot. You don't have to be a mechanic. There are so many different opportunities to get involved in aviation, which I just think is awesome.

It's a great field to get into, and it's a field that is in desperate need of people. A lot of people are seeing this right now when they're traveling. Although we don't have commercial air service here now, American Airlines canceled 50,000 flights this summer, and currently they have over 150 jets parked because they don't have enough crew to support the aircraft and get them up in the air. So it's a task that the industry collectively is going to have to look at as far as recruiting more folks and getting folks interested in the aviation field.

### **Andrew Gash**

And you mentioned briefly your past with this airport started in middle school when you got a tour of it and realized a little bit more about what it takes to keep this operation running. So tell me a little bit more about the rest of your story. How did you come to work at LAL? What are some of the lessons you've learned along the way?

### **Adam Lunn**

So I came to work here as an intern in 2011. I graduated from the University of South Florida and was on my way to Florida Southern, finishing up my MBA degree there. And I had reached out to the then Airport

Director asking is if there was any opportunity just to kind of get my foot in the door. And luckily there was and I was able to kind of start working my way up. Started out as an intern, enjoyed that, moved into the role of an operations specialist, then an operations coordinator, supervisor, manager, and now I'm serving as the Assistant Airport Director. And that's been eleven years. So coming up this June, I would have been here at the airport for twelve years.

### **Andrew Gash**

And how long have you been in this particular position as the Assistant Director?

### **Adam Lunn**

I've been in this role since October of 2022.

### **Andrew Gash**

And you and Kris together are spearheading the airport at a time that sees Lakeland booming. And so I'm sure you have some particular goals in mind as far as what the airport's role is going to be moving forward. What are some of those strategic ideas that you're looking to implement as you see the entire city becoming one of the busiest hot spots in the nation?

### **Adam Lunn**

Yeah, absolutely. I think for us, what we're seeing right now is a huge demand for access to this airport. And that's from a lot of businesses that are looking to come into this area. People are moving in and businesses see that and so they are looking: "Hey, how can we get access here at the Lakeland airport?" And the unfortunate thing is that - it's a good thing and a bad thing - in that we can't build it fast enough. So we have businesses come in and they're like, "I need 20,000 square feet or 50,000 square feet, but I need it now."

And that's where we have to work on and kind of make sure that we're guiding the airport in a direction so that we have spaces ready, we have spaces available for these companies to come in and to start operating. A lot of that starts way down at the bottom with making sure that we're following our master plan. So the airport does have a master plan that was developed in 2020 and so we're using that - that is our guidebook - and so we're using that to make sure that those opportunities for development, like our prime area we're trying to develop right now is our northeast quad and that's for heavy aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul. And we talked a lot about our 65 plus businesses, but we're also talking about diversity of businesses too. Because as the market and the economy change, different facets of aviation also increase in demand and decrease in demand.

So we want to make sure that we have a good diversity of income. And that's one area where we would like to see more activity here. Because not only that, but those are high skill, high wage jobs. So that's

bringing more of those high skill, high wage positions here into the community. But I guess to answer your original question, it's making sure that the airport is ready when the time comes and when those businesses are ready to come here.

### **Andrew Gash**

And there's been some technical improvements as well recently that have categorized the airport as a category what is it, a category three instrument landing system now installed?

### **Adam Lunn**

Yes, I would say kind of over the past ten years, we've really focused on making sure the bones of the airport are good. So we had some pavements out here that needed some attention, we needed to upgrade some facilities. So we've kind of done that the last ten years. And this last big project was upgrading to a CAT III instrument landing system. And for those of you who don't know, there's different categories. They go CAT I, II, and III. Three is, I guess you could say, the strictest in that it allows for airplanes to use what's called autoland.

So if you've ever seen a video of a plane landing in fog, this system will allow them to do that. And we're only the fourth airport in the state of Florida with that capability, and the 68th airport in the United States with that capability. And it really increases safety, especially in low visibility conditions, to have that available for air crews to utilize.

### **Andrew Gash**

So with Amazon, we've heard recently in commission meetings that they're looking to have this airport expand just so that they can increase their operations here. And one of the things that's so neat about that is that while they're helping to fund, or funding the expansion, those improvements will eventually revert to being owned by the airport. Correct? Maybe I've got that a little off. Tell me more.

### **Adam Lunn**

Yeah, absolutely. Amazon, when they came here, they had an original ground lease where they've got their existing sort facility there, as well as some ramp space. But what they need currently is some additional ramp space because they need to maximize the use of their existing facility. And it has some additional capacity that they are looking to utilize. And so Amazon, currently, they're going to extend their ramp out to the west, adding two additional positions for 767's. So larger aircraft. They can also put smaller aircraft on those positions as well. But they're looking to expand to the west. And with that, they needed to also extend a taxiway so that way they could have secondary entrance as well. So you didn't have any head to head issues on the ramp there.



Now that taxiway will actually revert to the airport and we will actually take over control but Amazon will be paying all the upfront costs for that. Now, they will be reimbursed for a portion of that through credits on their ground lease. But that is an asset that will belong to the airport. In fact, this is something a lot of people don't know, but that in aviation, especially in airports, ground leases, after the term is up, the asset will revert back to the airport. So any improvements at the end of the life of the lease will become property of the airport.

### **Andrew Gash**

So talking about things that people do and don't know, because there's so many different facts and figures that I've learned just by speaking with you, and it's easy to again assume that you kind of have an idea of what happens at the airport. For instance, people may say that it's just Amazon flights all day, but a lot of the planes that we see flying overhead may not even be landing here. You mentioned that. And of the Amazon ones, it's twelve in, twelve out every day?

### **Adam Lunn**

That's correct. So right now we have twelve in and twelve out a day for a total of 24 operations. And that number is expected to increase. And we want to make sure people do know that. But it is twelve operations in, twelve operations out. And currently the way it is structured is they're in bank arrivals. So a lot of folks will recognize this, where you'll see two, three, four kind of come in right after one another and that's because they're coming in in a bank and then they all leave in a bank as well. That is kind of the operational tempo that Amazon is operating under.

And two, we kind of mentioned some other airplanes in the area. There's other (General Aviation) airports in the area, in the county as well. So we do have a lot of aircraft that are not even talking to our air traffic control tower that are transitioning through the area and utilizing those other airports. And then sometimes you'll also see lower flying, large commercial service airplanes that are circling over what's called our VOR. It's a very high-frequency omnidirectional range. So if anyone's interested, they can definitely check out that piece of equipment. But it is basically a radio compass. And so airplanes will sit there and use that as a beacon to either get into Orlando or out of Orlando International or as a holding location if there happens to be weather in Tampa. So some of the aircraft that we see up a little bit higher, those are aircraft that aren't even coming here into Lakeland.

### **Andrew Gash**

Some residents have experienced the negative repercussions of having an airport close by, especially with the increased traffic noise. Mitigation, I know, is something that's important to you and to the staff here at LAL, but it's actually not under your control once they depart or where they're coming from when they're inbound. And that right there is something that I think a lot of people will be surprised by. I'm sure that they would think that everything that is happening around the airport must have to do with or be under the control of the staff here. But what's interesting as well, not only is it out of your control, that

doesn't mean you're not doing something about it and you're trying to help to mitigate that noise and to help the residents who are currently in the flight path, but you're going about it in a really particular way. So tell me more about that.

### **Adam Lunn**

So one thing that we're trying to do is we're trying to work with the FAA to address this through one of their approved consultants to develop what's called the Parkway Approach. And the Parkway Approach is going to move aircraft arrivals and departures to and from the east over the Polk Parkway. And we're trying to get them over transportation corridor, get them up a little bit higher so that way they can go at what's called flight idle, which means they won't be adjusting their throttle settings as much and generating some of that noise. And we also want to get them up at a little bit higher altitude as well. So we're trying to get these airplanes up in a good place where we're not conflicting with Tampa or Orlando approach controls and then also make sure that we're over a transportation corridor on the ground.

But also, as you mentioned, the airport itself, we don't have any control of the aircraft once they're in the air. We can only control what's on the ground. And that authority is vested exclusively with the FAA. And so we're having to go through this process with them to make sure that we have buy off with Tampa Approach, make sure that we have buy off at the regional level, and then we can get those procedures published if we receive concurrence.

### **Andrew Gash**

And how long does that process take? Because I'm sure that, again, there may be people like myself who think, "Well just tell them to fly a different direction." But this is a process that takes a few years, right?

### **Adam Lunn**

Yes, we've been at this for a very long time. Our first attempt was to do what's called a visual approach. And we went through that process, submitted it to the FAA, and the FAA decided that that wasn't the best solution, and so they asked us to revisit it and go back to this published instrument procedure. And so this procedure at this point in time will take about a year from once it's submitted. Now that we have concurrence from local air traffic over in Tampa, we have concurrence from them. We will then submit it to the region to obtain the approvals to actually move forward with the agreement.

### **Andrew Gash**

So let's talk about flight schools, because one of the things that I was so fascinated by was you said there are five or six different flight schools that are located on airport property?

### **Adam Lunn**

Yes, we have five different flight schools here.

**Andrew Gash**

And how young are these students who are earning their license?

**Adam Lunn**

Yeah, so you can start learning to fly as young as age 14, and some students have actually soloed airplanes at age 16. So we're looking at several different programs including the James C Ray Foundation, things like that, that have scholarship programs for these. Students actually graduate high school with their pilot's license.

**Andrew Gash**

And the flight schools are unique. I mean, there's five of them, but they each have sort of their niche, what they're teaching and which students would be interested in attending.

**Adam Lunn**

Yeah, there's different kinds of flight schools. There's Part 61 and then there's Part 141 flight schools. And basically it's, "What is the student interested in achieving? Are they interested in just being a private pilot or are they interested in flying for the airlines?" And so these different schools kind of cater to different types of students, so that way they have the best path forward.

For instance, when I was achieving my pilot's license, I went Part 61 because that adds a little more flexibility. It's more the private pilot route. Whereas somebody who's looking to fly for the airlines, someday they may choose to fly with the Part 141 School, where it's a little more structured. It's training you to be placed into that particular job role.

**Andrew Gash**

And for students who aren't going to a flight school, that doesn't preclude them from pursuing a career in the aviation field. Right? And again, that's going back to when we think, well, it's just pilots and mechanics, but there's a lot more than that. So for someone who's listening, who may be a high school student or a college student, and they're (thinking), "What am I going to do after I graduate?" What job openings are out there? Because you mentioned there's a shortage and it's of more than just pilots and mechanics. So how can they be pursuing a career in the aviation industry?

**Adam Lunn**

Yeah, absolutely. So just my own personal background: I have a business degree. I've applied that degree towards the aviation field. And I think that whether it's a marketing degree, an accounting degree, if you enjoy working with your hands in the trades, we've got a lot of maintenance openings and things

like that for folks here to maintain this mass of facilities out here. And that's across the industry, including maintainers on aircraft. There's a shortage for aircraft maintainers, AMP mechanics, and then, of course, the pilot shortage we've talked about. But there's a lot of different pathways either through trade school, college, and then, of course, the military is a great pathway as well to make your way into the aviation field.

### **Andrew Gash**

So Lakeland Linder is the home of NOAA Aviation, right? And again, that's the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for those of you who are listening, who don't know what NOAA stands for, which I was one of them until I looked it up, but not just in the region. This is for the whole nation, I mean, this is their hub for flights for these hurricane hunters in the whole region. But it's more than just hurricane hunters. They operate all year. Tell me more about what they're doing.

### **Adam Lunn**

They do. So they're most famous for the hurricane hunting role. That is their nickname as the Hurricane Hunters. And in every summer/kind of fall time frame, we always are watching the news. We're waiting for that next storm to come across the Atlantic or out of the Caribbean. And they have three airplanes in particular here, two of them being that the P-3 Orion. Those are the airplanes that fly directly into the storm and they're collecting all the atmospheric data. Then they also have a Gulf Stream, which is sort of a high altitude jet that'll fly over the storm to collect that data.

But in the times where they're not flying through those storms, they're actually out doing a lot of other atmospheric research. Whether that's storms over the plains in the central part of the United States, or if they're out flying and looking at atmospheric rivers over the Pacific. They're studying all different kinds of weather systems. And then they additionally have aircraft like the Twin Otter or King Air that are doing coastal mapping. They're doing research on whales and sea lions and things like that. And they're actually sort of the air arm of the science research industry, if you will, where they're actually going out and providing those aerial assets to scientists that are looking at climate and the ocean in particular.

### **Andrew Gash**

So, of course, we can't talk about the airport without talking about Sun 'N Fun, which is just a few weeks away. And I hear there's a lot of changes this year with the Sun 'n Fun Expo. And there have been changes on the property in the past year with the introduction or the opening of the new Skylab. So tell me about these brand new happenings over at Sun 'n Fun.

### **Adam Lunn**

Yeah, absolutely. We're really excited about the changes that are coming this year to really improve the guest experience. And the Sun 'n Fun team down there has done a great job of looking at: how do we

improve mobility? How do we improve activities for folks to see and be a part of? And I think some of the highlights, at least for this year, are the introduction of the new east parking lot. So folks will have an option coming in to park in the east parking area with a new entrance on that side of the airfield and tram service down into the core of the air show. So I think that's going to be a huge increase in mobility for folks to get in and out quickly and enjoy the show.

The other thing that they're doing is online ticketing where folks can purchase ahead of time and hopefully speed up some of that check in process while they're there. But also the layout of aircraft on the airfield has changed where Sun 'n Fun is shifting a lot of the aircraft now to the east side of the airport. And they've introduced what's called The Island. And this is going to kind of be a central repository where anyone flying in can come and catch an Uber or a Lyft. They can get Publix delivered via Instacart. I believe Frescos is even setting up a restaurant in there for the week. So they're really focused on the customer experience. And they've also added some evening activities including a lot of sunset activities down at Paradise City, which is where the ultralights are.

### **Adam Lunn**

But some of the other facility improvements that have happened on the campus year-round include the SkyLab Center, which is really interesting because that is their STEM education facility there. And they have a lot of different classrooms and STEM activities there from engineering, pilot sciences, science-on-a-sphere...and it is a great tool and something that we're all really excited about. And I think something that folks even here locally may not know is that Sun 'n Fun is really the fundraiser for the Aerospace Center for Excellence. And all the folks coming out and participating and all the revenue that they generate there are going back into aviation education and the ACE programs that they have there year round.

### **Andrew Gash**

And you just mentioned, with ACE being the parent company, Sun 'n Fun, the Expo, that's just a single event. But throughout the year there's opportunities for the public to come in to enjoy learning about aviation outside of just the Expo with, for instance, Skylab, right? They can come anytime.

### **Adam Lunn**

Absolutely. With ACE, Airspace Center for Excellence, they're also the home of the Florida Air Museum. And so there they have programs year round where folks can come out and learn about the local aviation history and aviation history here in the state of Florida. And there's also different summer camps and camps available for folks to participate in. And then also they've done things like story time for younger kids to come out as well during the week. So they're really trying to make sure that they're reaching folks at all age levels and really get them inspired by aviation, whether that's to pursue a career in aviation or to pursue something else. It's really about making sure that we can get folks out and inspired by the sciences and have that participation there on the campus year round.

## **Andrew Gash**

One of the biggest questions in Lakeland is: "When are we going to get commercial flights at Lakeland Linder?" And I know that that is a loaded question, because it's a whole lot more than just having some airline say, "Okay, we're coming to Lakeland." I mean, there's a lot that's involved in that. First of all, from the standpoint of the airport just being ready to accept commercial flights. But I know that you've also mentioned that COVID affected that search. And now that COVID has hopefully run its course, you're moving forward with that search. So what are the advantages, what are the drawbacks, even, of bringing commercial service to Lakeland?

## **Adam Lunn**

I think one of the biggest requests that we get year round is requests for air service. And that's a question we get all the time and something that we've been working on for a very long time. And it is a marathon, it is not a sprint. That is one thing that we have learned throughout this entire process. And the market changes constantly. And so whether that was the fuel pricing issues just a few months ago - that drastically swung how airlines were approaching expansion. COVID itself impacted expansion.

## **Adam Lunn**

When we look at, like, Southwest, they went into 16 new markets during COVID. And now that the recovery has happened, now Southwest is primarily focused on maturing those markets and making sure that they can stand on their own. And so that's changing their strategy of expansion.

We're also looking at airlines changing how they operate. Delta, for instance, is pulling out of a lot of smaller communities throughout the United States. In fact, through COVID, I believe it's twelve airports across the country have lost all commercial air service. So we're at a time where there's the pilot shortage, the crew shortage, airports are losing service around the country, and we're out there recruiting and trying to find a carrier to come in here to Lakeland.

## **Adam Lunn**

And one thing that's important to note is we're looking for a carrier that's going to be a partner. We're looking for the right partner that's going to service the folks here. And we're targeting our top four markets so we can go in and we can look at all the ticket sale information. And our top five markets are New York, Washington, Chicago, Denver and Nashville. And so we're really trying to target those markets, or at least ways to get to those markets through hubs like Charlotte or Atlanta.

But as far as the airport, it's really about providing a service for the community. It's about providing that and meeting that demand that we see is growing. Especially as we mentioned earlier, we're talking about earlier, the mass movement here into the city. Demand is only increasing. In fact, our demand for air

service from this area makes up about 2.8% of the entire region's demand. That's up a point just since 2019. So we are seeing increased demands.

And we look at all different kinds of things from drive times to ticket pricing to things like that when we're talking to these different carriers. And it's really, truly about finding that right partner, someone who's going to come in. And we always like to also preface this with saying: we're not looking to become Tampa or Orlando, we're looking to be Lakeland. So we're looking to find service that's going to be beneficial here for our community. And that's really the positive. It's providing that connectivity not only for the citizens who live here year round, but also for businesses that are looking to come into Lakeland.

We mentioned the positive effects that having international capabilities has had on bringing new business or being an element of bringing new business into the community as well.

And then, of course, some of the drawbacks would be increased flights. So there is the potential for larger airplanes flying overhead. Again, we're not looking to become Tampa or Orlando with hundreds of commercial passenger flights a day, but (more flights) would happen.

### **Andrew Gash**

So is there anything else that you'd like to add as far as just when speaking with people who are not familiar with maybe just Lakeland or if you've lived in Lakeland your whole life perhaps, but you just never knew the extent of airport operations...One visit will totally change your view of what's happening here in Lakeland, especially of just the intricacy and the incredible operations that are happening at Lakeland Linder. But is there anything else you'd like to add for those who are listening that might surprise them about just what's happening here?

### **Adam Lunn**

Yeah, I think we've touched on a lot, but I think the big thing is just the diversity of operations here. We have everything from fighter jets to large transport category aircraft to small piper cubs that are all sharing the same airspace and the same space on the ground. And hats off to our team again here at the airport, air traffic control. We couldn't do it without all of our dedicated team here. But I think it's truly the impact that this facility has on the community, being that \$1.5 billion economic impact and providing those 3,000 jobs, I think that is a staggering number. And people are always surprised to hear that there's 3,000 people that actually work out here on a daily basis.

### **Andrew Gash**

Now, before we go, even if those of you who are listening have no interest in flight whatsoever, there's something else now at the airport for the foodies out there. It's Waco Kitchen, and this is their second restaurant in the nation.

**Adam Lunn**

It is.

**Andrew Gash**

So Lakeland is home of their brand new, their first ever expansion. And I just have to ask about it. Tell me a little bit about this new restaurant and what should people try first?

**Adam Lunn**

Yeah, absolutely. So Waco Kitchen opened up just this past summer. This is their second location. Their original home is in Battle Creek, Michigan. And Waco, for those who are familiar with aviation, it is Waco Aircraft Company. So it is the aircraft company and they decided to open up their own restaurant and this is their first expansion. And so it's a very unique experience. It's all farm-to-table, fresh, local-resourced meals, and just about anything on the menu is great. But if I had to pick a favorite, it'd probably be the Waco Tacos. That's probably the best thing that I've tried on the menu.

**Andrew Gash**

And it's right here at the main airport terminal on the second floor. You're overlooking the runways, right?

**Adam Lunn**

Yes. So it's located here in the main terminal on the second floor and definitely check out their website for any hours. I do know that they have some closures during the fly in, so please make sure you check that out if you're thinking about visiting them during the event. But year round, they're pretty much open Monday through Saturday from 11:00 A.M. until 08:00 P.M. But it's definitely a unique environment to come and watch all the airplanes while you enjoy a great meal there.

**Andrew Gash**

And you were mentioning checking out their website. Where can listeners go to learn more about what the airport is doing or tours or anything else like that?

**Adam Lunn**

Yeah, absolutely. Highly recommend folks go to [FlyLakeland.com](http://FlyLakeland.com). We have our full airport master plan there. We have our full airport layout plan available. So if anyone's interested in what the airport is going to look like or sort of our guidebook of the future, it's available there. You can check out all of our different businesses and tenants if you're interested in learning more. And of course, we love to talk to folks and anytime we can get group tours out here, we definitely welcome it. So definitely contact our offices. You



can email [lakelandairport@lakelandgov.net](mailto:lakelandairport@lakelandgov.net) and request a tour and we'll do our best to accommodate those.

**Andrew Gash**

Awesome. Adam, thank you for joining us today. Thank you for all of your insight into the operations here.

**Adam Lunn**

Yes, sir. I appreciate your time and thanks for coming out and visiting us.

**Andrew Gash**

It's incredible what you and what the team are doing here at Lakeland Linder, and of course, you and Airport Director Kris Hallstrand, you're not slowing down in your efforts to make Lakeland the best it can be. And I hope, those of you who are listening, you'll take the time to learn more. Again, go to [FlyLakeland.com](http://FlyLakeland.com). You can learn more about Lakeland Linder and check out Waco Kitchen while you're at it and have a tasty meal. I know that's going to be one of my next stops and I cannot wait to try it. Thank you for listening.