

## **INTRODUCTION**

Mississippi has a broad system of airports throughout the state, as detailed in the 1999 *Mississippi Statewide Airports Study*. Owing to the comprehensive analysis conducted for that study, it is not the intent to recreate it as part of the MULTIPLAN. Rather, the highlights and findings of the study have been incorporated for their relevance as part of the overall MULTIPLAN efforts.

There are 78 airports in the Mississippi Aviation System, ranging in size and scope from international airports serving commercial airlines to small turf strips accommodating aerial applicators and general aviation aircraft. These airports accommodate passenger, military, air cargo and general aviation aircraft. There are 2,830 registered aircraft, and 4,160 registered pilots in the State. **Exhibit 7-1** identifies all airports in the Mississippi system of airports.

## **KEY ISSUES**

There are several key issues that will have a profound impact on the commercial aviation, general aviation and air cargo industries in Mississippi. Among these issues are:

- Airline consolidation and financial instability
- Flight training and pilot licensing
- Funding priorities
- Security issues
- North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)

Trends in the commercial airline industry will certainly impact air service in Mississippi. Airlines industry-wide are following policies of consolidation and reduction in terms of scheduled flights. At the time of this assessment the number of scheduled flights nationally was approximately 80% of those prior to the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 terrorist hijackings, and the load factor for the airline industry was only near 60% of that before September 11<sup>th</sup>. This unprecedented drop in load factor combined with the financial instability in the airline industry prior to September 11<sup>th</sup> is driving the major carriers and their subsidiaries to reduce service to the terminal airports or cancel scheduled service altogether.

Having an understanding of the issues affecting general aviation is important since virtually all of the airports in Mississippi have a general aviation presence. General aviation as a whole has experienced a resurgence since the mid 1990's. While restrictions on airspace and anticipated regulation on pilot training and registration, will have an impact on general aviation, it is not anticipated that general aviation activity will be negatively impacted in the short run.

In fact, one of the early actions of the FAA after "9-11" was to advise its field facilities that the policies that restricted AIP funding were being temporarily lifted. This allows the FAA to use discretionary funding and permits the airports to use their entitlement funding

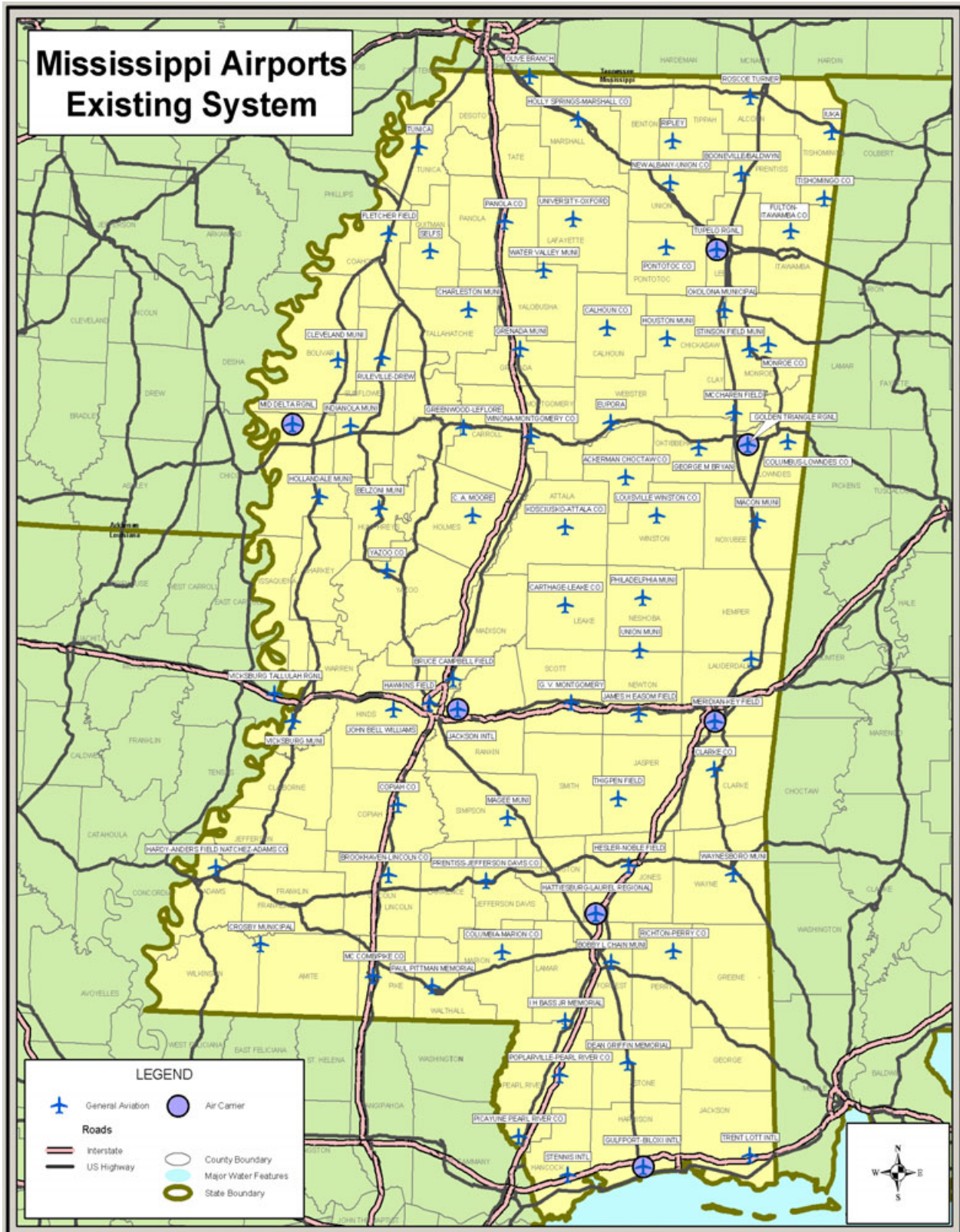
for any security project (equipment and facilities). Additionally, recent events have produced an increase in charter activity at airports nationwide.

The impacts of NAFTA will continue to encourage investment in the civil/general aviation infrastructure of the Gulf Coast/Gateway States. As demand for goods and services in developing countries of Latin America increases and as trade with Mexico grows as a result of the maturation of the NAFTA, airports in Mississippi need to be prepared to accommodate increases in passenger and air cargo demand with these countries.

In order to accommodate the anticipated growth, several airports are considering runway extensions to handle wide-bodied aircraft, including passenger or air cargo aircraft. These longer runways will allow heavier aircraft to land and take off, as well as travel to or from remote markets such as Latin America. Interest in this international gateway development in Mississippi is one factor that has led to runway development and/or expansion at Tunica and Gulfport. This aggressive approach to market positioning was also the motivation behind the current development of a cargo apron at Jackson.

While Mississippi airports need to prepare for increased passenger and air cargo demand, the airports also need to make adjustments to incorporate the reduction of the size and/or weight of aircraft where possible to avoid having to pay as much in landing fees. Such a move on the part of airlines can lead to a direct impact upon the funding capabilities of Mississippi's airports and, as such, need to be taken into consideration within the airport planning processes.

Exhibit 7-1  
MISSISSIPPI AIRPORT SYSTEM



**CURRENT AIR SERVICE**

Twenty-one passenger airlines serve Mississippi at seven commercial service airports. **Table 7-1** identifies airlines serving Mississippi's commercial service airports, while **Exhibit 7-2** identifies the seven commercial service airports.

**Table 7-1:  
AIR CARRIERS SERVING MISSISSIPPI'S COMMERCIAL SERVICE AIRPORTS**

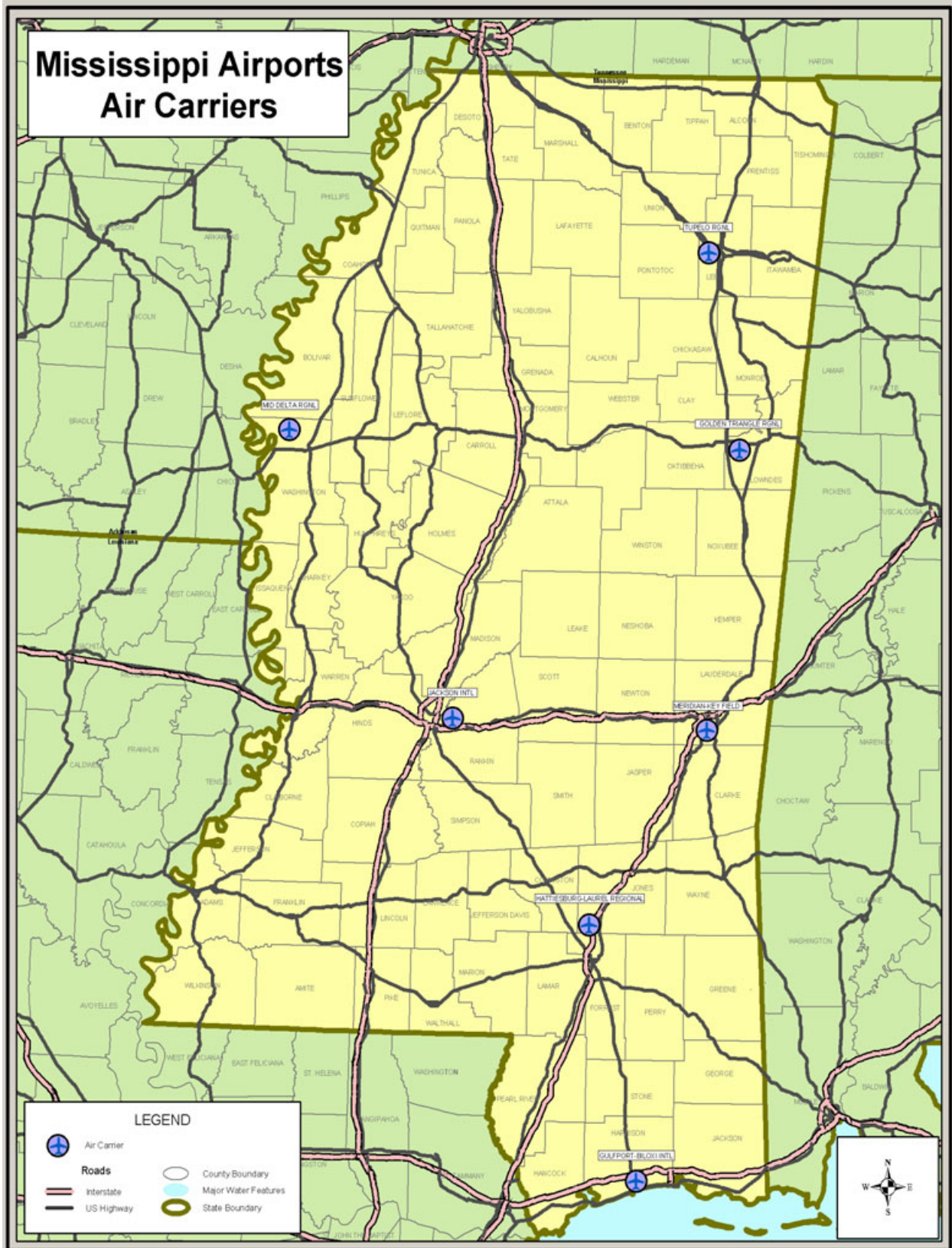
<b>GOLDEN TRIANGLE REGIONAL</b>	<b>JACKSON INTERNATIONAL</b>
<i>North West-Airlink</i>	<i>ASA-Delta Connection</i>
<i>ASA-Delta Connection</i>	<i>American Eagle</i>
	<i>Com Air-Delta Connection</i>
<b>MID DELTA REGIONAL</b>	<i>Continental Express</i>
<i>North West-Airlink</i>	<i>Delta</i>
	<i>North West-Airlink</i>
<b>GULFPORT-BILOXI INTERNATIONAL</b>	<i>Southwest</i>
<i>ASA-Delta Connection</i>	<i>Continental Express</i>
<i>North West-Airlink</i>	<i>US Airways Express</i>
<i>Continental Express</i>	
<i>Air Tran</i>	<b>MERIDAN REGIONAL</b>
<i>North West-Airlines</i>	<i>North West-Airlink</i>
	<i>ASA-Delta Connection</i>
<b>HATTIESBURG-LAUREL REGIONAL</b>	<b>TUPELO REGIONAL</b>
<i>North West-Airlink</i>	<i>North West-Airlink</i>

Source: Official Airline Guide, November 2001

Air cargo is transported in and out of Mississippi on passenger aircraft and all-cargo aircraft. These aircraft are operated by airlines, all-cargo carriers, and integrated express operators. Commodities typically transported as air cargo include the following:

- Aeronautics – Equipment & Parts
- Automotive – Equipment & Parts
- Pharmaceuticals
- Computers & Computer Components
- Diagnostic Equipment
- Medical Equipment
- Software
- Textiles – Garments
- Perishables – Flowers, Fruit, Vegetables & Fish
- Economic Perishables – Printed Material
- Telecommunications Equipment – Cell Phones and Beepers
- Photographic Film

Exhibit 7-2  
MISSISSIPPI COMMERCIAL AIRPORTS



Air cargo transport typically takes place at commercial service airports, but may on occasion occur on an ad hoc basis at general aviation airports. Following are detailed attributes of the seven commercial service airports in the state:

*Golden Triangle Regional Airport* – Golden Triangle Regional Airport serves three cities forming the triangle: Columbus, Starkville, and West Point. In 1999, Golden Triangle Regional Airport reported 45,215 passenger enplanements. Additionally, according to the FAA, just over 31,276 general aviation operations took place at the airport.

Golden Triangle Regional Airport has one runway. Runway 18/36 is 6,497 feet in length and 150 feet in width. This runway is capable of accommodating wide-bodied aircraft and has a precision landing system.

*Mid Delta Regional Airport* – Mid Delta Regional Airport located in west-central Mississippi has commercial air service provided by Northwest Air Link. In 1999, Mid Delta Regional Airport reported 13,220 passenger enplanements. Additionally, according to the FAA, just over 23,000 general aviation operations took place at the airport.

Mid Delta Regional Airport has three runways. Runway 9/27 is 4,564 feet in length and 150 feet in width. Runway 18R/36L is 7,019 feet in length and 150 feet in width. Runway 18L/36R is 8,001 feet in length and 150 feet in width. The parallel runways have precision landing capabilities. Runway 9/27 does not have a precision landing system.

*Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport* – Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport is located on the Mississippi Gulf Coast midway between New Orleans and Mobile. Gulfport-Biloxi International is served by five airlines offering 30 scheduled flights per week to nine non-stop destinations. In 1999, Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport reported 398,259 passenger enplanements. Additionally, according to the FAA, just over 63,000 general aviation operations took place at the airport.

Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport has two runways. Runway 14/32, the primary runway, is 9,002 feet in length and 150 feet in width. Runway 18/36, the secondary runway, is 4,950 feet in length and 150 feet in width. Both runways have a precision landing system. Runway 14/32 is capable of accommodating wide-bodied aircraft.

*Hattiesburg-Laurel Regional Airport* – Hattiesburg-Laurel Regional Airport, located in south-central Mississippi, has commercial air service. In 1999, Hattiesburg-Laurel Regional Airport reported 13,006 passenger enplanements. Additionally, according to the FAA, just over 14,488 general aviation operations took place at the airport.

Hattiesburg-Laurel Regional Airport has one runway. Runway 18/36 is 6,501 feet in length and 150 feet in width, and has precision landing capabilities.

*Jackson International Airport* – Jackson International Airport is located in central Mississippi. In 1999, Jackson International Airport reported 659,502 passenger enplanements. Additionally, according to the FAA, just over 70,878 general aviation operations took place at the airport.

Jackson International Airport has two parallel runways. Runway 16L/34R and 16R/34L are 8,500 feet in length and 150 feet in width. Both runways have a precision landing system and are capable of accommodating wide-bodied aircraft.

*Meridian Regional Airport/Key Field* – Key Field, located in east-central Mississippi, has commercial air service. In 1999, Key Field reported 30,516 passenger enplanements. Additionally, according to the FAA, just over 29,823 general aviation operations took place at the airport.

Meridian Regional Airport/Key Field has two runways. Runway 1/19, the primary runway, is 10,004 feet in length and 150 feet in width. Runway 4/22, the secondary runway, is 4,586 feet in length and 150 feet in width. Runway 1/19 is capable of accommodating wide-bodied aircraft and has precision landing capabilities.

*Tupelo Regional Airport* – Tupelo Regional, located in northeast Mississippi has commercial air service. In 1999, Tupelo Regional Airport reported 16,550 passenger enplanements. Additionally, according to the FAA, just over 23,064 general aviation operations took place at the airport.

Tupelo Regional Airport has one runway. Runway 18/36 is 6,500 feet in length and 100 feet in width, and has precision landing capabilities.

## **GENERAL AVIATION AIRPORTS**

General aviation airports in Mississippi support a host of aviation functions in the state. The stratification process in the Mississippi Statewide Airports Study identifies in more detail the role each airport plays in the state's aviation system. Some of the aviation activities at the state's general aviation airports include the following:

- Corporate aviation
- Air cargo activity
- Agricultural aviation
- Flight instruction
- Military operations
- Skydiving
- Recreational flying
- Air shows
- Medical evacuation
- Organ transport
- Forest firefighting
- Real estate tours
- Aerial photography
- Pipeline patrols
- Oilrig support
- Environmental mitigation
- Civil Air Patrol
- Search and Rescue

## **SUMMARY**

The Mississippi system of airports currently provides good access to travelers for business, personal and emergency needs. The system structure is built on four levels of airport service, beginning with the basic services provided to the local communities with Type I airports. Additional service is provided to local communities for business use with Type II airports. Finally Type III and Type III Enhanced airports provide regional access to the air transportation system with facilities necessary to attract and maintain industry.