



Frequently Asked Questions: Friedman Memorial Airport History

Q. When did Friedman Memorial Airport (FMA) open?

A. In 1931 the Friedman Family grant-deeded land to the City of Hailey for a small grass-strip airfield south of the then-lightly-populated town. At that time, there were neither commercial flights nor, until some years later, a resort economy in Blaine County. And of course there were no jet aircraft.

Q. How has FMA changed since 1931?

A. Since the 1930's, FMA has seen continual improvement. Additional land was purchased by the City of Hailey and Blaine County to meet the business challenges created by the development of the air service industry. In particular, the evolution of private and commercial aircraft, which have generally become larger and faster, necessitated changes to meet Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) design standards. Changes in the local economy, mostly attributable to a favorable resort environment and the growth of the travel and tourism industry, also drove the need for upgrades and expansion.

Q. When did it become evident that FMA had reached the limit of its capability as a commercial airport?

A. By the last decade of the 20th century FMA had reached the limits of its commercial air service capability, and the Friedman Airport Authority determined that the solution did not lie in more expansion of the existing site. Constraints in terms of surrounding mountainous terrain, and seasonal winter reliability, cannot be overcome with technology, as determined by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). In addition, land and space limitations that preclude reasonable expansion, incompatible airline equipment, future air service potential, and customer dissatisfaction with diversions, cancellations, high fares, and limited airline access led to the decision to seek a new airport location. Many local residents had begun using Twin Falls and Boise for air service and this trend has increased through 2010.

For example, it has become all too common for winter season flights – both commercial and private – to be diverted from Friedman. Reliability of service is a critical factor that impacts the quality of a visitor's experience flying into and out of Sun Valley.

Q. When was the Friedman Memorial Airport Authority (FMAA) formed?

A. FMAA was formed in 1994. The Authority is comprised of five members representing the two owners of the airport – the City of Hailey and Blaine County – and the public. The county appoints two members to the board; the city appoints two members and they, in turn, must unanimously approve the fifth independent member. All the representatives supported and encouraged commercial air service to the community at FMA and each member has consistently supported the development of a replacement airport once it became factually evident that FMA could no longer meet the present and future commercial air service needs of the community.

Q. What are FMAA's responsibilities?

A. To manage a safe, economically viable airport and to provide the community with modern infrastructure for existing and future commercial air service and general aviation use.

Q. Does the FMAA only represent the City of Hailey, as some claim?

A. The FMAA represents the entire community. The County Commissioners have two seats on the 5-member FMAA and must concur on the selection of the fifth member. The County Commissioners are elected by a county-wide vote and are responsible to all sectors of the community, from Carey to Sun Valley. The County understands and supports commercial air service for the north county resort businesses and the County is also acutely sensitive to the needs of all the community's businesses and the visitors who support the local economy.

Q. Who owns FMA?

A. FMA is jointly owned by the City of Hailey and Blaine County. The replacement airport will be owned entirely by Blaine County.