



For Immediate Release

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Ford Airport Breaks Ground on Phase I of Federal Inspection Station *Project First Step in Bringing Direct International Travel to West Michigan*

Grand Rapids, Michigan, September 16, 2020 – The Gerald R. Ford International Airport today broke ground on Phase I of a new federal inspection station, which will ultimately allow the Airport to support nonstop international commercial passenger flights.

Phase I of the construction project, which will take place on the east end of the terminal, will include a new baggage claim area, restrooms and operations infrastructure that will be used for domestic flights until the full FIS project is complete. Conversations have begun at the federal level for a full FIS build out, but a timeline is not in place for completion.

The FIS is part of Project Elevate and one of three new developments for Ford Airport to accommodate projected passenger growth over the next 20 years. With support from Sen. Peter MacGregor, former Sen. Dave Hildenbrand, former Rep. Chris Afendoulis and The Right Place, Project Elevate secured a \$5 million grant from the MEDC to begin work on curbside improvements needed for the FIS, which is expected to cost a total of \$30 million.

No local taxpayer dollars will be used to finance Project Elevate, which will be paid for with a combination of federal and state grants, municipal bonds issued by the airport and user fees.

“Phase I of this project is an important step forward as we work to bring direct international travel to West Michigan,” said Tory Richardson, president and CEO of Ford Airport. “Creating this additional space will signal to the federal government we are serious about creating an FIS at the Ford Airport while offering us needed additional baggage claim area in the meantime.

“We are thankful for funding from the MEDC, which required us to begin this project now. While our numbers, like those of every airport around the country, have been impacted by COVID-19, we have seen steady growth in the number of passengers throughout this summer and are ahead of our projections.”

Currently, the Airport cannot process direct international arrivals, other than private aircraft. When a private aircraft lands at the Airport from an international airport, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, or CBP, agents meet and screen passengers at the aircraft. Without the dedicated screening facilities of an FIS, CBP’s screening capacity is limited to small aircraft.

The addition of an FIS will provide a permanent home at the airport for customs officers, allowing CBP to consolidate multiple locations into a single facility. The Airport will eventually build a corridor from Concourse B that will lead to a dedicated customs area, complete with screening

equipment, security, holding cells and other FIS requirements. When fully built out, the FIS will be able to screen 400 passengers per hour.

“As we continue to emerge from the pandemic, we know our community is anxious to get out and to explore,” said Dan Koorndyk, Board chair of the Airport Authority. “We look forward to enhancing the gateway to West Michigan by providing our guests a convenient, comfortable travel experience in state-of-the-art facilities.”

Architect for the project is Mead & Hunt while The Christman Company is serving as general contractor. The project is expected to have more than an \$8 million impact in the West Michigan economy.

Announced in August 2019, Project Elevate was slated to get underway in spring 2020 but was delayed because of the coronavirus. In addition to the FIS, the Airport plans to expand Concourse A and to relocate the current air traffic control tower to the east side of the airfield.

Expansion of the terminal apron, which is a critical component to Concourse A, will be completed in the coming weeks.

At its peak in 2019, the Ford Airport generated more than \$3.1 billion in annual economic impact, serving more than 3.58 million passengers. COVID-19 severely impacted airline travel across the globe, but traffic is slowly continuing to grow. This summer, the Ford Airport recently introduced its new Fly Safe. Fly Ford. campaign to educate travelers on new precautions for their health and to restore confidence in air travel.

About the Ford Airport

The Gerald R. Ford International Airport is the second busiest airport in Michigan, serving business and leisure travelers with nonstop and connecting flights on six airlines. The Ford Airport is managed and operated by the Gerald R. Ford International Airport Authority. For more information, visit www.flyford.org or follow the airport on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @FlyGRFord.

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