

Norfolk International Airport History

As early as 1903, Hampton Roads was making a connection with aviation. The Virginian-Pilot based in Norfolk, Va. was one of the first newspapers in the country to publish an eyewitness account of the Wright Brothers' historic first flight.

1920s

In 1926, Norfolk citizens flew commercially for the first time on the Mitten Line, operated by Philadelphia Rapid Transit Air Service, Inc. Round-trip service to Washington and Philadelphia was available only a few months before high costs forced its discontinuance. In 1929, Ben Epstein, a veteran World War I flyer, started an air taxi service between Norfolk and Richmond from his airfield on Granby Street in Norfolk. That same year, the Luddington Line began the first daily scheduled service from Epstein's field to Washington, D.C. Far from today's routine business travel, a flight in 1929 was an occasion for family, friends, photographs and fine clothes. Women dressed in their finest climbed aboard the 10-passenger Fokker Trimotor and men followed in their broad brimmed hats. A week later, Eddie Rickenbacker's booming Eastern Airlines made its first appearance in Norfolk with twice daily round trips to Richmond, Va.

1930s

Commercial air travel hit a snag in 1932 when the Navy opposed the expansion of the Granby Street field because of its proximity to flying operations at Norfolk Naval Air Station. Commercial air flight operations moved to Glenrock Airport, but in 1932, the Great Depression had taken its effects on aviation and all commercial flights were suspended indefinitely. Norfolk was ground bound for the next five years.

In 1938, city-owned Truxton Manor Golf Course was converted to Norfolk Municipal Airport, complete with a 3,500-foot runway. This site would become southern Tidewater's permanent home of commercial air travel. Penn Central Airlines (now United Airlines) used a renovated clubhouse for a passenger terminal. The first permanent terminal was complete by 1940.

1940s

With World War II, Norfolk Municipal Airport became a vital resource to the war effort. The Army Air Corps assumed control of airport operations between 1942 -1947, extending the runway and adding two more to handle the vastly increased number of flights with larger and larger aircraft. As the troops returned from the war, the Army Air Corps returned the Airport to the city's domain, and commercial travel took off with two new airlines providing regular flights.

In 1948, Piedmont Airlines initiated flights. That same year, ground was broken for a larger, more modern terminal building.

1950s

By the early 1950s, there were more daily flights in Norfolk than New York's La Guardia Airport. In 1950, responsibility for the airport was turned over to the newly established Norfolk Port and Industrial Authority (NPIA) which could proudly call Norfolk Municipal Airport one of the finest in the nation and one of the busiest. In 1951, the new terminal was officially dedicated.

1960s

In the 1960s, the transition from propeller driven aircraft to jets gathered full steam. Norfolk Municipal

Airport took on the new demands for longer and stronger runway and taxiway facilities easily, and jetliners here became the rule, not the exception. As a result, in 1968, the Airport was officially recognized as the air transportation center for the entire Hampton Roads region, and became known as Norfolk Regional Airport. To prepare for exponential growth over the next three decades, NPIA developed a comprehensive master plan that would move the airport into the 21st century in full stride.

1970s

In 1974, the Airport dedicated its new, state-of-the-art terminal and additional land was secured for further expansion. In 1976, the Airport's name was changed to Norfolk International Airport with the addition of Federal Customs facilities. New outbuildings housing the fire station, maintenance depot, ATC tower and more were also planned and came on line as needed. However, one of the challenges in expanding was capitalizing on the location of the Airport's neighboring Botanical Garden, creating a beautiful buffer zone between the Airport and the outside world. Norfolk International Airport, surrounded by year-round beauty, has become a national role model for reconciling expanding air facilities and a delicate ecological sanctuary.

1980s

In the 1980s, many changes were taking place. A new general aviation facility opened and a new air cargo terminal was completed for all operations. Parking facilities were also expanded. Even the name of the supervising body changed in 1988 - from Norfolk Port and Industrial Authority to Norfolk Airport Authority.

1990s

Changes continued throughout the 1990s as Norfolk International prepared for growth. The air cargo terminal and parking facilities expanded and public areas of the passenger terminal were renovated. In 1991, Norfolk International completed a new concourse extension comprised of 10 additional gates, for a total of 24 gates. A new state-of-the-art fire station and new FAA air traffic control tower facility also began operation.

To take advantage of the ever-changing computer age, Norfolk International was the first airport to develop an official web site in August 1994, and new Internet access booths were installed to let travelers plug in and log on for e-mail, banking, business, or reservations.

2000s

The Norfolk Airport Authority continues the master plan process to pave Norfolk International's way for the next 30 years. The Airport's largest capital improvement project, Arrival 2002, was completed in June 2002. The \$133 million project included a new 243,000-square-foot arrivals building with an automated baggage handling system; a 2,850-space covered parking garage; runway and taxiway rehabilitation and upgrades; main terminal lobby refurbishment; and a new food/beverage and retail concession program. Future expansion of long-term parking, air cargo and general aviation facilities in addition to the construction of an additional runway are key elements to the Airport's master plan. All of these improvements have been designed and carefully scheduled to become a reality before the need is critical.

2010s

In addition to dining and retail additions and upgrades, in-airport advertising and service improvements, the Airport completed renovations of General Aviation Facilities, Phase I renovation of the Departures Terminal Lobby to include a 10,000' skylight complex, expanded TSA passenger screening checkpoint on Concourse B, terrazzo flooring in the center of the lobby and the length of both concourses. Phase II will include expansion of the TSA's passenger screening checkpoint on Concourse A, new restrooms,

upgraded concourse wall and lighting treatments, renovation of airline gate areas on both concourses and upgrades to lighting and flooring in the airline ticketing lobbies.

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Phase II will include expansion of the TSA's passenger screening checkpoint on Concourse A, new concourse restrooms, upgraded concourse wall and lighting treatments, renovation of airline gate areas on both concourses and upgrades to lighting and flooring in the airline ticketing lobbies.

Phase III improvements include renovation of the public restrooms in the Departures Terminal second-level main lobby and first-level ticketing lobbies, renovation of the Family Convenience Room in the Departures Terminal second-level main lobby, construction of three "Mother's Rooms" in the Departures Terminal second-level main lobby and on both Concourses A and B, a new Visitor Information Center in the main lobby and relocation of Delta's ticket counter operation to the North side ticketing lobby.

In 2017, new restaurants were opened by HMSHost: The Local @ ORF, Here's to the Heroes and ORF|MKT. Hudson Group opened a new retail store, Sweet Indulgences.

Projects underway in 2018 include a US Customs entry facility at the general aviation terminal, relocated rental car return facility in Garage A, expanded public and employee parking, improved ramp access on Concourse A, improved wayfinding, landscaping and rehabilitation of the airfield.

Norfolk Airport Authority continues to pursue funding for a parallel runway through the Federal Aviation Administration. The Airport's Master Plan calls for a parallel runway of approximately 6,700 feet in length which would provide a concomitant capability to handle all of the commercial aircraft currently operating at Norfolk International. The runway will be located approximately 850 feet east of existing Runway 5/23. All construction will take place on existing Airport property; there are no plans to acquire additional property to accommodate the proposed runway.

Norfolk International Airport Historic Highlights

April 7, 1938

The present Airport site opened with Penn Central (now United Airlines) providing the first air service. The facility was named Norfolk Municipal Airport.

March 3, 1940

The first terminal was dedicated.

1942 -1947

During World War II, the U.S. Army Air Corps assumed command of the Airport.

October 1947

The Airport was returned to the city by the U.S. Army Air Corps.

July 1, 1948

Norfolk Port and Industrial Authority (NPIA) was created.

May 1, 1949

NPIA given "supervision" of the operation and maintenance of the Airport.

January 1, 1950

NPIA received full responsibility for the operation of the Airport.

May 5, 1951

What is now the International Terminal was dedicated, then serving as the primary passenger terminal facility.

1968

Name changed to Norfolk Regional Airport.

October 6, 1970

City conveyed Airport title to NPIA.

January 18, 1974

New state-of-the-art terminal building was dedicated by local dignitaries and national celebrities.

January 21, 1974

Flight operations commenced in the new terminal buildings by the airlines.

January 19, 1976

Name officially changed to Norfolk International Airport due to availability of federal inspection facilities; the International Terminal facility dedicated.

February 1, 1983

New FBO (general aviation facilities) opened by the Airport.

January 1, 1985

New air cargo terminal opened for all operations.

October 1, 1986

Phase I of Airport Parking garage opened.

April 4, 1988

Name of supervising body officially changed from Norfolk Port and Industrial Authority to Norfolk Airport Authority.

April 7, 1988

Norfolk International Airport celebrated its 50th anniversary.

May 1, 1988

Cargo terminal Phase II completed.

October 1, 1990

Phase II of Airport parking garage completed.

June 1991

Expansion of concourse B is completed, adding 10 gates.

June 1992

Refurbishing of public areas of passenger terminal completed.

August 1993

New fire station completed, boasting leading edge aviation industry standards.

January 22, 1995

New FAA air traffic control tower facility began operation.

August 1996

New field maintenance facility completed to house snow removal and maintenance equipment, as well as field maintenance personnel.

January 1, 1998

Airport begins celebration of 60 years of service to Hampton Roads.

August 2000

Airport completes new retail and food/beverage concessions program; New fire training facility opens, complete with leading edge emergency preparedness equipment and systems.

August 2001

Main terminal lobby refurbishment completed.

June 27, 2002

Arrivals terminal and parking garage dedicated.

July 1, 2002

New arrivals terminal complex opens to the public.

April 7, 2003

Norfolk International Airport celebrates its 75th Anniversary

November 1, 2013

The first of several phases of interior renovations began in the main lobby, concourses and screening checkpoints.

November 2013

Renovations to general aviation facility at Landmark Aviation completed.

March 2014

Phase I renovations to main lobby, concourses and security checkpoint on Concourse B completed.

July 2014

Phase II of the renovations project include enlarged security checkpoint on Concourse A, new restrooms, skylights and interior finishes on Concourses A & B, terrazzo and carpet in the Arrivals Building and carpet in the ticketing lobbies. Anticipated completion Spring 2016.

September 2015

Phase II renovations to concourse restrooms, airline gate areas and security checking on Concourse A expected completed.

September 2016

Phase III renovations to restrooms in the main lobby and ticketing lobby, construction of three "Mother's Rooms" in the main lobby and on the concourses and a visitor information center in the main lobby are underway. Completion expected May 2018.

2017

HMSHost opens new dining: The Local @ ORF, Here's to the Heroes and ORF|MKT. Hudson News Group opens new retail: Sweet Indulgences.

2018

Projects underway include a US Customs entry facility at the general aviation terminal, relocated rental car return facility in Garage A, expanded public and employee parking, improved ramp access on Concourse A, improved wayfinding, landscaping and rehabilitation of the airfield.