



## **Cotulla Airport History**

The Cotulla Municipal Airport was constructed in 1947 with two crossing runways and served as an emergency airfield for military training aircraft in the area. The airport was noted for its FAA Flight Service Station (FSS) providing weather and pilot briefings until 1982 when it closed along with many other remote FSS locations. There never was a full-time business at the airport but there was intermittent activity. Decades ago there was even a small commuter airline that briefly offered service between Laredo and San Antonio with a stop in Cotulla. The airport gradually declined over the years until there was a single short (3,300') runway with numerous potholes, no runway lights, no fuel or other services, and it was unattended. The City seriously considered closing the airport.

In 1988, the situation improved dramatically when the local Economic Development Committee persuaded the City, County and current operator, E. T. Page, to enter into a lease agreement and airport management contract to improve the airport and provide services to the public, especially to hunters and ranchers. The airport became the Cotulla-La Salle County Airport at that time. Improving the airport became a joint effort by the entire community.

Improvements started immediately. The operator established his residence on the airport for better security and customer service. The runway was repaired to the extent possible and trees and brush were cleared away from the runway out to a safe distance. The old FSS building was renovated and converted into an office and terminal, and the runway lights were repaired. The operator also constructed a hangar, opened an aircraft maintenance shop, and began selling both Avgas and Jet-A fuel which was a first for the airport. Traffic improved steadily as pilots learned the airport was attended and services were available.

In 1991, the Texas Department of Aviation noted the substantial traffic growth and approved a \$1.8 million Airport Capital Improvement Project grant for a longer and wider runway (to 4,000'x60') and doubled the aircraft parking area. That project was completed in 1992. The operator also doubled the size of the aircraft hangar at that time. The next goal was to obtain a 5,000'x75' runway for jet aircraft, but the 4,000' runway was too short to allow enough jet traffic operations into the airport for TxDOT-Aviation to justify this request. That problem was solved in 1996 by lengthening the runway to 4,600' using local resources, and the jet traffic increased substantially. Soon enough jets were landing at Cotulla to satisfy TxDOT-Aviation's requirements and the airport received a \$2.9 million grant for a new 5,005'x75' runway and additional parking.

When that project was completed in 2005, the airport recorded an immediate 50% increase in large-aircraft traffic, and each subsequent year had similar growth. Soon many jets were landing at Cotulla that were larger than the airport was designed to accommodate. In 2009, TxDOT-Aviation approved a 6,005' runway, full-length taxiway and even more aircraft parking.

Local funding for our share of this \$6.8 million project was unavailable until 2011 and additional delays prevented construction from starting until early 2014. Since project completion in 2015, the increase in traffic count and aircraft size has been incredible. This project was the largest general aviation project in the state that year, and firmly established the Cotulla airport as the aviation center for the entire area. The airport has truly become a magnet for economic growth. In 2016, the Cotulla airport was recognized as the TxDOT-Aviation Airport of the Year.

A new airport terminal (about five times larger than the original terminal) was completed in 2020 and offers services and amenities not available anywhere else in the area. Additional major improvements are also planned, like a new aircraft hangar, fuel farm, and more runway and ramp construction, so there will be substantial continued airport growth in the months and years ahead.

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