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The Sky's the Limit at West Virginia International Yeager Airport



Nick Keller

West Virginia International Yeager Airport

Nick Keller is Airport Director and Chief Executive Officer of the West Virginia International Yeager Airport. He began his career at the airport in 2005 as an intern before being promoted to his current role in 2019. His vision is for the West Virginia International Yeager Airport to become the most important economic engine in West Virginia through advances in aerospace and education. A Charleston, West Virginia native, Keller received both his bachelor's degree in organizational leadership and supervision and master's degree in aviation management from Purdue University.

Since taking over as Airport Director and CEO in 2019, I have been on a mission to make West Virginia International Yeager Airport (CRW) the most important economic engine in the state of West Virginia through advances in aerospace and education.

As the largest commercial airport in the state and growing, our mission to make CRW a nationally recognized aviation powerhouse is coming to life. Given the addition of Marshall University's Bill Noe Flight School on airport grounds and the newly opened U.S. Customs and Border Protection facility, not only is CRW keeping up, we are setting the trend as a thriving hub of aviation.

With a host of innovative projects that have the potential to bring massive economic development to the region, CRW is setting the bar for the future of all things aviation. Whether it is increasing military training operations, exploring advancements in electric aircraft technology, or educating the next generation of pilots, it is all happening right now at CRW.

We continue to think big when it comes to development at the airport, including changes that benefit the traveling public and the state of West Virginia. Our airport has applied for a piece of the \$5 billion available through the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which is intended to address the aging infrastructure of our nation's airports. We've applied for \$12.2 million in federal funds to cover the first phase of building a new terminal.

CRW is almost 75 years old. The funds from the infrastructure bill are vital to helping us grow into the next 30 years. We are excited about the possibility of a new terminal, as it is our opportunity to have a modern, top-of-the-

line facility that you might experience in larger cities. Some of the planned improvements include a more consolidated terminal, two baggage carousels, all gates on one level, and the capability to accommodate larger aircraft at each jet bridge.

The economic impact of the proposed terminal project is massive and could create 856 permanent full-time jobs, with an economic output of \$424 million from construction alone, according to a recent study.

We continue to focus on ways to keep our local economy growing while also being a gateway to the world. The long-term impact of what we do now is vital to what we can achieve in the future.

On April 19, 2022, we opened the doors to our U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) General Aviation Facility (GAF). This solidifies the only international port of entry in West Virginia. The international designation being added to our airport name evens the playing field and will eliminate a competitive disadvantage for West Virginia, making it seamless for international businesses to travel directly to our state without having to clear customs elsewhere, first. We estimate that several hundred additional flights per year will use the new facility to clear customs, and while they are here, they may buy fuel from us, creating a significant economic impact.

The future is bright and limitless at CRW, especially as more people take to the sky and choose to fly locally from Charleston. Aircraft operations recently reached levels that exceed pre-pandemic levels at CRW. The numbers from 2019 to 2022 show a 15 percent increase in operations.



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Our success as the state’s largest airport is not possible without the help of our community and business leaders. As a result, we have formed an Air Service Working Group with the Charleston Area Alliance. This group will be a conduit for funding to establish minimum revenue guarantees and setting goals for obtaining additional air service.

An essential part of our future is our runway infrastructure. CRW is currently working with the Federal Aviation Administration to study the addition of the required standard runway-safety areas on both ends of our runway. The addition of standard safety areas will

eliminate the need for airlines to block off seats from sale due to weight restrictions and allow for future growth at CRW. Construction of runway improvements is also an opportunity to provide new developable land around the airport.

Increasing aircraft operations and service at CRW also include looking at future technology and new types of aircraft – specifically entirely electrical aircraft commonly known as eVTOL, or Electric Vertical Takeoff and Landing aircraft. CRW has a goal to electrify our airport so that we are at the forefront of this emerging technology.

Future development and improvement plans at CRW also include a consolidated Rental Car Quick Turn Facility, a new maintenance and public safety building, and an aerospace economic development center.

As we move forward, we are focusing on connectivity, not only to your next destination but to one another. We look forward to seeing you at CRW soon and appreciate your patience and support as we work to ensure that CRW remains a world-class airport. **V**