

# COTULLA-LA SALLE COUNTY AIRPORT

Controlled expansion is the name of the game at COT.

Within the next two years, Cotulla-La Salle County Airport (COT) will have another capital improvement project under its belt. It was recently notified by its state aviation department of the specific scope and timing of its next project. COT will construct a 6,000-foot runway with full-length taxiway and double the ramp area. Already, the airfield has had two major construction projects in the last 14 years.

“The rate at which we’ve been growing is exceptional because we don’t have a lot of locally based airplanes,” says Airport Manager E.T. Page. “However, we have a lot of people who fly in for hunting, ranching and to conduct oil/gas business.”

Years ago, Page was approached by the local economic development committee (EDC) to suggest ways to make the airport better. Back then, he says there was nothing but a 3,300-foot grass-encroached strip with no lights, no commercial presence and little activity.

COT previously had a local FAA Flight Service Station, but it closed in 1982 when small stations around the nation were consolidated into a few automated flight service stations. The Cotulla FSS housed a tiny operations building for “pilot briefings,” and that was the only activity the airfield saw for the longest time. When that closed, times were really bleak for the airport. Eventually, the EDC convinced

Page and his family to move to Cotulla to improve the airport; the rest, as it’s said, is history.

“When my wife and I first arrived, we improved the facilities, provided customer services, got the lights up and running, and cleared out the brush from around the runway to make it safer,” says Page. “It was still short, but we got enough traffic to convince the state to extend the strip to 4,000 feet, and that was completed about 14 years ago.”

Page says he and his associates at Page Aviation continued recording traffic to obtain approval to extend the runway again to 5,000 feet—which was his initial goal—because this runway length is standard for most corporate jets.

In order to get enough jet traffic to qualify for an FAA-funded 5,000-foot runway, COT actually extended the runway on its own with 600 feet of asphalt for a total of 4,600 feet. It was only then that COT began receiving enough jet traffic to justify to the Texas Department of Transportation that the runway should be extended to 5,000 feet, which was completed four years ago.

“Since we increased to 5,000 feet, we have had phenomenal growth with enough operations by aircraft more than 25,000 pounds to warrant a 6,000-foot runway with more strength,” Page explains. “We’ll double the ramp area, get a full-length taxiway and extend the runway on our next project, which



will probably get moved up to sometime within the next 12 months.”

To this end, Page explains federal stimulus money may play a role in moving the timeline forward. Left to TxDOT’s normal timing, he says it would take a year and a half to get the engineering started; now, engineering should start in about six months as projects ahead of COT start sooner.

Aside from future developments, Page says COT already has the best instrument approaches in the area and is scheduled for an even better GPS LPV approach to coincide with the new runway. The airport also has a deer-resistant fence all around the runway, ensuring deer and other wild animals are a minimal concern. Additionally, COT has a professional office equipped with computers, tables, DVDs and other amenities for pilots. There are rental cars on site, and the airport even provides catering.

Page says none of this would be possible, though, without the help COT has received. “We’ve had such great support from our community, and we’ve achieved incredible things through this partnership,” concludes Page. “It took all of us working together, and I’ve been especially grateful for the support we’ve received from the city and county governments. They have actively supported our efforts in every possible way.” →

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