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A rendering of the 80,000-square-foot AAR hangar is shown. (Courtesy Rendering from FSB Architects & Engineers)

\$37.5M airport hangar project to generate over 200 jobs

By: **Jeff Elkins**//The Journal Record//April 5, 2024

OKLAHOMA CITY – A new \$37.5M, three-bay hangar at Will Rogers World Airport is expected to create 225 jobs in the maintenance, repair and overhaul industry.

AAR CORP., an aircraft maintenance services company, broke ground Friday morning on a three-bay, 80,000-sq-ft MRO facility to expand services for Alaska Airlines. The new hangar will sit adjacent to AAR's existing seven-bay facility at Will Rogers World Airport and will support Boeing 737s.

Airport officials, state legislators and representatives from AAR and Alaska Airlines were present at Will Rogers on Friday for an official groundbreaking ceremony.

Airports Director Jeff Mulder said the \$37.5 million expansion has been in the works for years and will result in more than 200 aviation jobs in the Oklahoma City market. The project funding comes from a \$20 million grant from the State of Oklahoma, as well as rent concessions over time from Will Rogers World Airport.

Lt Gov. Matt Pinnell said the new hangar is a part of the effort to further the state's second-leading industry, aerospace and aeronautics.

According to a Senate release, the industry provides more than 200,000 jobs to Oklahomans and generates close to \$44 billion in economic activity annually.

He spoke on the global impact of Will Rogers and the importance of expansion efforts in taking Oklahoma City from the 20th largest city in the U.S. to the top 15.

"The AARs of the world and other companies that want to be here, that's how we get it done," Pinnell said.



A groundbreaking ceremony was held at Will Rogers World Airport Friday morning for an 80,000-square-foot airplane maintenance facility to expand services for Alaska Airlines. (Staff Photo by Jeff Elkins)

AAR is the largest heavy maintenance company in North America and one of the largest in the world. John Holmes, chairman, president and CEO of AAR, said it all started in Oklahoma City more than 50 years ago.

Holmes outlined the three components needed for his company to expand: long-term customer commitment, which Alaska Airlines fulfilled with their direct flight to Seattle, a supportive airport and government and access to a large talent pool.

“This is a job creator. We have about 400 people at the site today, and with this expansion, that will increase by 50%,” Holmes said.

Alaska Airlines Vice President for Maintenance and Engineering Don Wright said the quality his company strives to obtain at their MROs is critical to the safety of the aircrafts.

“That quality is what happens here in Oklahoma,” Wright said.

One of, if not the most ardent advocates for the aerospace industry in the Oklahoma legislature, state Sen. Paul Rosino, R-Oklahoma City, said he was excited when following redistricting in 2021, the entire airport became part of his district.

He said aviation is continually growing, and without true partners like AAR, it's not possible.

Grayson Ardies, Executive Director for the Oklahoma Department of Aerospace and Aeronautics, said the hangar helps solidify the state as the MRO capital of the world.

"We have Tinker Air Force Base just across the way, we have American Airlines up in Tulsa, and we've got the world's largest third-party MRO provider in AAR right here, which obviously we're celebrating today," Ardies said. "We fix airplanes, we keep them flying, and that's our legacy. We're very proud of it and this is another step in that direction to try to make our second largest industry number one."

Oklahoma City Airports Director Jeff Mulder said the industry needs more capacity to maintain airplanes because airlines are growing.

"When you think about what's happening in the industry with deliveries of airplanes, some of the problems Boeing is having, it makes it more important to maintain current aircraft you have to keep them around longer to serve the public and serve the markets," Mulder said.

Mulder said he's anticipating a ribbon cutting for the new hangar in about a year and a half.