



DETROIT METRO • WILLOW RUN
WAYNE COUNTY AIRPORT AUTHORITY

L.C. Smith Terminal • Mezzanine
Detroit, MI 48242
ph 734 942 3550
fax 734 942 3793
www.metroairport.com



Kimley-Horn
and Associates, Inc.

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Contacts:

Julie Beauvais, Kimley-Horn, (919) 653-6626
Scott Wintner, Wayne County Airport Authority, (734) 955-3745

Newly-Reconstructed Detroit Metro Airport Runway Reopens in Time for Holiday Rush

DETROIT – Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport (DTW) reopened one of its major runways following final inspection by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) on November 20, just in time for the holiday travel rush. Airport and community officials will gather at DTW on Thursday to officially celebrate the re-opening of Runway 3R/2IL and its connecting taxiways, which have been completely rehabilitated and repaved. The project was designed by engineering firm Kimley-Horn of Michigan.

During construction, aircraft operations usually assigned to the closed runway was reassigned to one of DTW's other three parallel runways. At peak times, Runway 9R/27L, one of the airport's crosswind runways, was also used for arrivals and departures, resulting in a temporary increase in air traffic noise north and east of the airport.

“The Airport Authority recognizes that this critical runway rehabilitation project resulted in some temporary inconvenience for some of our neighbors, particularly during this past summer,” said Wayne County Airport Authority CEO Lester Robinson. “Now that the runway rehabilitation is complete, normal air traffic patterns have been resumed.”

Originally constructed more than 30 years ago, the runway was showing signs of its age: buckles, holes, patches, and uneven pavement, which led to frequent closures for maintenance. The purpose of the rehabilitation project is to extend the useful life of the runway – a critical piece of the Detroit region's transportation infrastructure – by at least another 20 years.

“The new runway will provide smoother takeoffs and landings,” said Kimley-Horn engineer J.J. Morton. “And eliminating the need to close the runway for repairs will certainly help improve traffic flow.”

“We appreciate the strong support and understanding of leaders from all of our neighboring communities who recognize the importance of this project for the long-term viability of our region,” Robinson said.

The \$50 million dollar project was designed to take advantage of environmentally-friendly construction practices wherever possible. The concrete from the original runway was salvaged, crushed, and recycled for use as aggregate for the new shoulders and blast pads. Asphalt millings were recycled for use as a stabilized base for the haul roads and staging areas as well as used in resurfacing of the perimeter roads. Recycled slag aggregate materials also were used in the concrete mix for construction of the new runway.

The newly installed pavement section consists of 17 inches of concrete pavement over 9 inches of bituminous base course over 16 inches of crushed aggregate base course.

The runway project recently won an award for the top state airport project from the Michigan Concrete Pavement Association.