

Airport eyes passenger service

BY BRAD FLORY

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GAYLORD — Improvements made in the past year and ones on the drawing board would make Otsego County Airport fully equipped to handle regular commercial passenger flights in the foreseeable future.

During the past year, officials have made changes and additions to complex electronic landing equipment housed at the airport, improvements expected to attract more sophisticated aircraft to the facility.

Those changes include moving and adding to Otsego County Airport's instrument landing systems (ILS), used to facilitate instrument landings of properly equipped planes.

The first improvement made was to move part of the airport's existing ILS system, called a "VOR," to a more efficient location on the field.

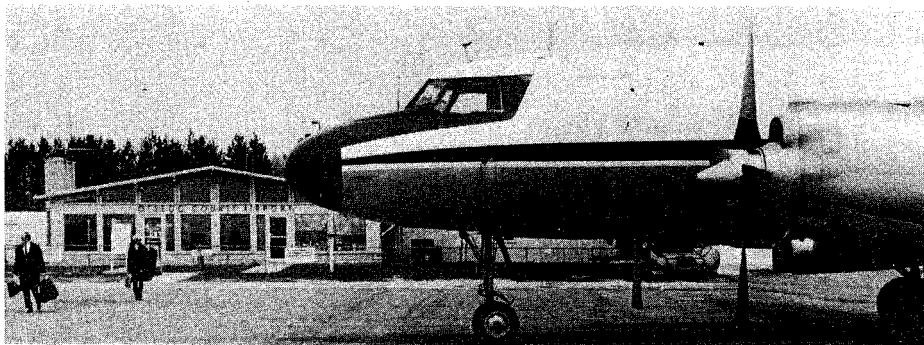
Without getting into highly technical terms, the VOR sends out radio signals in a 360 degree pattern, electronically telling approaching planes their position in relationship to the VOR tower — in terms something like the numbers around the center point of a clock — and whether they are moving toward or away from the tower.

The VOR tower was moved to a new location, at the intersection of the field's two runways, to avoid interference from metal buildings in the nearby Gaylord Air Industrial Park.

AIRPORT officials say another major improvement was the addition of \$300,000 worth of Distance Measuring Equipment, or DME, to the facility's instrument landing system last fall.

The DME broadcasts signals telling planes, in addition to the information received from the VOR, their approach speed and distance from the landing field in tenths of miles.

With the VOR and DME systems, Otsego



SIGN OF THINGS to come? This General Motors executive's plane dwarfs the terminal at Otsego County Airport on a visit last May. The runway physically can handle many of the

large planes being used for commercial passenger service. Further lengthening would be required, however, for authorized regular service.

County Airport's instrument landing system is almost complete. One further addition, hoped to be installed in the next three to five years, would make the ILS system complete.

That final addition would send an electronic "glide slope" landing signal to incoming planes. That system, along with the existing VOR and DME systems, would enable sophisticated planes to make safe, pinpoint landings through electronic readings in the cockpit.

A FURTHER improvement planned at Otsego County Airport is lengthening (from 5,000 to 6,500 feet) and strengthening the main, or east-west, runway.

The present runway is under the legal length requirement for landings of commercial passenger jets, such as DC-9's.

Airport manager Pete Crawford says the lengthened runway, along with a complete

ILS system, would make the airport "fully capable" of handling passenger air service.

Crawford hopes to secure funding for the runway lengthening project within the next one to three years.

Funding for all airport improvements comes, primarily, through grants from revenues collected from state and federal aviation fuel taxes.

In nearly all areas, 1981 has been a growth year for the airport. January through August statistics show increases in numbers of aircraft served, passengers deplaned and airport revenues, compared to the same period in 1980.

With 5,315 transient aircraft served and 13,342 passengers deplaned so far this year, both of those categories reflect about a 6 percent increase from 1980 levels.

Gross revenues collected at the airport, through fuel sales and landing fees, show an

even more significant increase. With \$184,759 collected, county revenues are up a substantial 23 percent.

Although the airport, at this point, mainly serves business flights, Crawford points to services to the area made possible by the Otsego County Airport.

For example, courier services operating out of the airport offer same-day delivery of important documents to any point in the country.

Medical services are provided, Crawford says, through daily flights to and from downstate medical facilities. Services include rapid medical testing and results from laboratory facilities not available locally, and rush shipments of rare blood types when needed for transfusions.

The airport also makes possible daily shipments of personal checks to the Federal Reserve Bank in Detroit, Crawford adds.

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