
Chapter 1.0 Purpose and Need

1.1 Introduction

Gary/Chicago International Airport (Airport or GYY) is a full-service airport capable of serving general aviation, corporate, commercial, and cargo activity in the Greater Chicago Area. The Airport is in Lake County in Northwest Indiana near the shore of Lake Michigan, approximately 25 miles southeast of downtown Chicago, Illinois, and approximately 60 miles west of South Bend, Indiana (**Figure 1.0 Location Map**). Locally, GYY is approximately three miles northwest of the City of Gary and approximately three miles southeast of the City of East Chicago (**Figure 1.1 Vicinity Map**).

Figure 1.0 Location Map



Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) *NEPAssist* Tool with labeling by Mead & Hunt, 2024

Figure 1.1 Vicinity Map



Source: USEPA NEPAassist Tool with labeling by Mead & Hunt, 2024

GYG serves as the third Chicago airport (along with Chicago O'Hare International Airport and Chicago Midway International Airport). It participates in an agreement with the City of Chicago Department of Aviation, referred to as the Compact, that provides mutual benefit and annual funding to the Gary/Chicago International Airport Authority (GCIAA) for operations and capital improvements at the Airport. The GCIAA is a municipal corporation responsible for the management and development of GYG. The Compact recognizes the Airport's role and its benefit to the Greater Chicago Area as a reliever airport for cargo and passenger air operations. This compact and the Airport's location within a large metropolitan area create opportunities for growth at the Airport.

The Airport has provided scheduled commercial passenger service in the past, but this service has been intermittent since 2000, peaking at 27,000 annual enplaned passengers in 2004. Pan Am, Southeast, Pace Aviation, Casino Express, and Allegiant have all provided brief commercial air service to GYG during this period, but each ultimately suspended service. Although the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) classifies the Airport as a Nonprimary Commercial Service airport in the *2023-2027 National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS)*, the Airport has been a general aviation and corporate facility following

Allegiant's departure in 2013. In its 2012 report *General Aviation Airports: A National Asset*, the FAA categorizes GYY as a National airport.¹

Two paved runways support aircraft operations at GYY (**Figure 1.2 Existing Airfield Configuration**). Runway 12/30, the primary runway, is 8,859 feet long by 150 feet wide and oriented in a northwest-southeast direction. Runway 2/20 is the crosswind runway and is 3,604 feet long by 100 feet wide, oriented in a north-south direction. The Airport is 993 acres in size and includes the following major facilities:

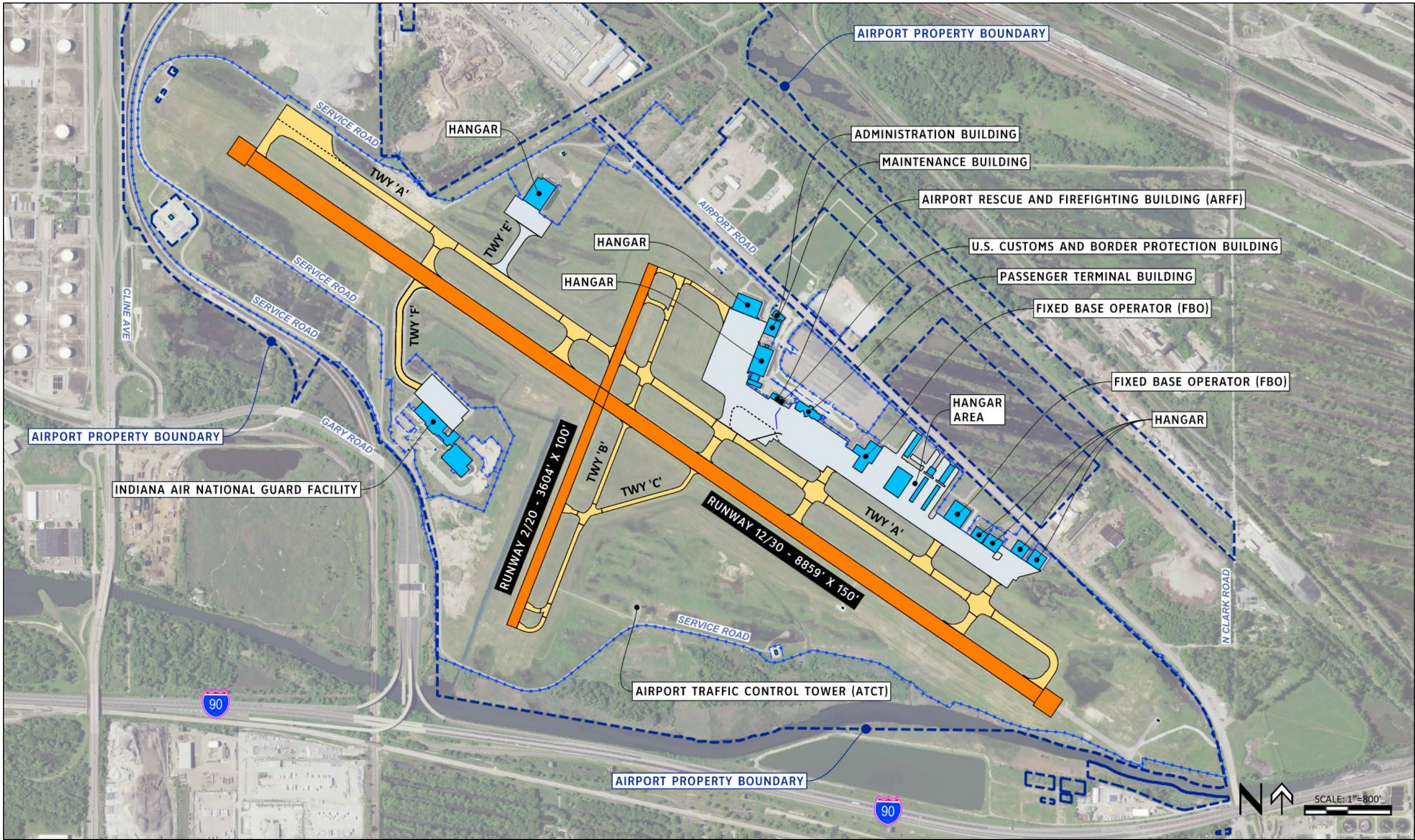
- Passenger terminal building
- Two fixed base operators (FBOs)
- Airport Traffic Control Tower (ATCT)
- Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting building (ARFF)
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection building
- Indiana National Guard facility
- Maintenance building
- Administration building
- Hangars

For additional maps and information on the Airport including its history, existing facilities, and the role it plays in the community and the Greater Chicago Area, see **Chapter 3.0 Affected Environment and Chapter 4.0 Environmental Consequences**.

GYY is an important transportation resource that supports vital air transportation links, economic development, and jobs in the Greater Chicago Area. The *2022 Indiana State Aviation Economic Impact Study* by the Indiana Department of Transportation quantified the total impact of GYY at 880 jobs with a total annual payroll of \$83.9 million and a total annual economic impact of \$152.7 million.

¹ A total of 84 airports within 31 states in the U.S. were categorized as National airports in the FAA's *General Aviation Airports: A National Asset* report. National airports are located in metropolitan areas near major business centers and support flying throughout the nation and the world. These airports support operations by the most sophisticated aircraft in the general aviation fleet. Many flights are by jet aircraft, including corporate and fractional ownership operations and air taxi services. These airports also provide pilots with an alternative to busy primary commercial service airports.

Figure 1.2 Existing Airfield Configuration



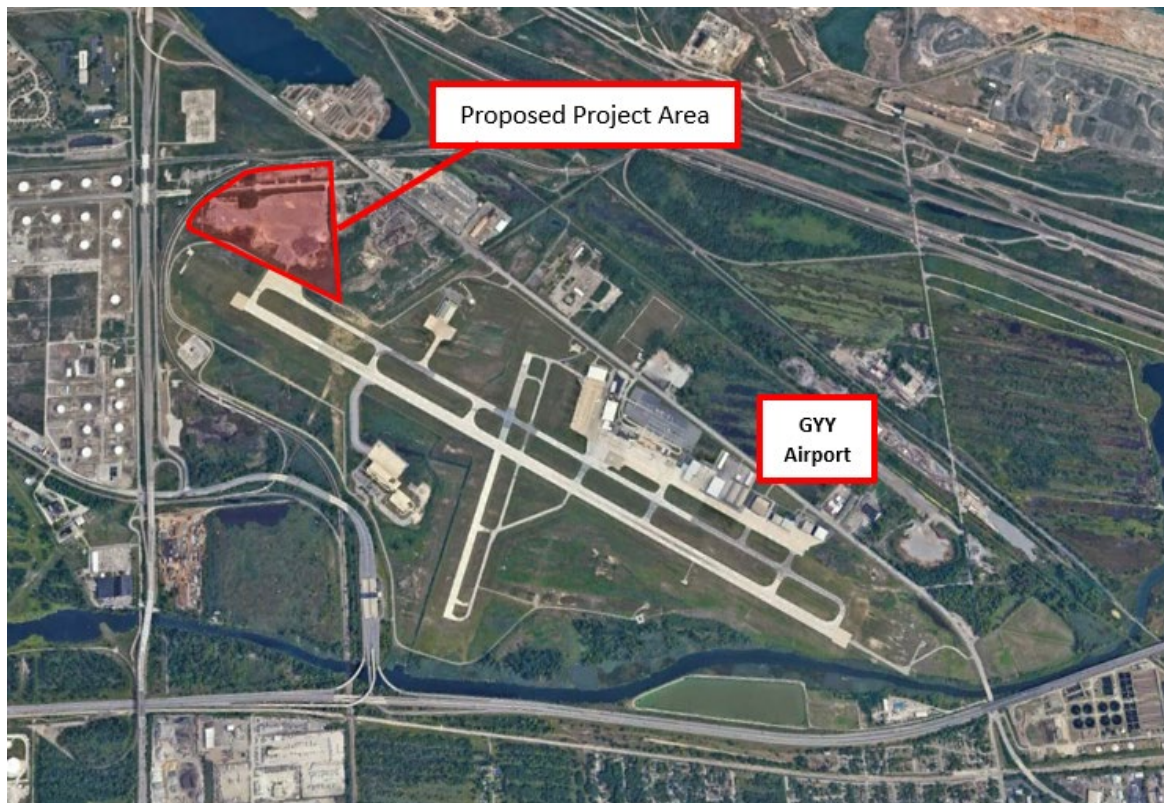
Source: Mead & Hunt, Inc.

1.2 Proposed Project

The Airport's proposed project involves the development of a multi-tenant air cargo logistics area on the northwest side of the Airport with room to expand northeast of Taxiway A and west of Airport Road. **Figure 1.3 Proposed Project Location Map** shows the location of proposed air cargo development on the Airport. For additional location information, see **Appendix A – Site Photos** and **Appendix B – Airport Layout Plan**.

The proposed development encompasses an approximately 50-acre area for air cargo operations. The development includes two taxiway connectors to the apron area for efficient aircraft movement, accommodating aircraft with primarily Airplane Design Group (ADG) IV, such as the Boeing 767, and the flexibility to accommodate a Boeing 777 (ADG V) in the first parking position as needed. The aircraft movement geometry is designed for a Taxiway Design Group 5 standard for operational safety.

Figure 1.3 Proposed Project Location Map



Source: 2024 Google Earth imagery with labeling by Mead & Hunt

The Phase 1 area, which is the focus of this Environmental Assessment (EA), will include the following proposed development items:

- Eight aircraft parking positions (Boeing 767)
- Approximately 750,000 square feet of apron and ground support equipment (GSE) pavement
- Approximately 135,000 square feet of taxiway connector pavement
- Approximately 180 truck parking spaces
- Approximately 570 employee parking spaces

- Approximately 220,000 square feet of air cargo facility space
- Security fencing

The air cargo logistics area will also include the utility infrastructure to comply with the needs for each tenant including apron electrical lighting, aircraft gate power, IT/communications infrastructure, truck and/or hydrant fueling system, fire protection, water, sanitary sewer, and storm sewer infrastructure.

The development of the air cargo logistics area will be covered in detail as a part of the Preferred Alternative in **Chapter 3.0 Affected Environment** and **Chapter 4.0 Environmental Consequences**. For additional discussion of the Preferred Alternative selection process, see **Chapter 2.0 Alternatives Considered**.

1.3 Purpose and Need for the Proposed Project

The purpose of the proposed project is to develop a new air cargo logistics area on the northwest side of the Airport with future expansion capabilities to allow GYY to serve as an alternate or supplemental cargo option in the Greater Chicago Area.

The need for the proposed project is to serve current cargo operations and to accommodate the air cargo growth that has occurred. GYY does not have a dedicated cargo space, and as a result the majority of cargo activity is handled by FBOs and is limited to small just-in-time shipments of small quantities of high value goods. The development of a new air cargo logistics area will address the existing limits the Airport has in serving the current cargo needs.

No dedicated cargo buildings or infrastructure are on the existing Airport site. However, GYY's location in the Greater Chicago Area with its active movement of goods provides a long-term opportunity for the Airport, and air cargo has been a key marketing focus for both the Airport and the City of Gary. The 2022 Master Plan Update concluded that the expected cargo growth needs a dedicated area for aircraft parking, warehousing, and truck parking/movements.

Since the completion of the 2022 Master Plan Update, the Airport has secured a long-term lease agreement with United Parcel Service (UPS) for air cargo service. Initially, UPS occupied the passenger terminal building and terminal apron for their offices and operations. In preparation for returning scheduled passenger service the Airport renovated the passenger terminal building, causing UPS offices to be moved to temporary facilities adjacent to the terminal building. However, UPS still uses the terminal apron for their aircraft and cargo operations. A new cargo logistics apron is needed to provide a base for UPS aircraft as well as other cargo carriers that have expressed interest. The new UPS lease agreement illustrates the need for a new dedicated cargo logistics area that separates UPS operations from the passenger terminal area while enhancing safety and efficiency of both cargo and passenger aircraft.

1.4 Summary of Existing and Projected Operations

According to the FAA's Operations Network (OPSNET) and Air Carrier Activity databases, GYY had the following activity levels in 2023:

- 4,098 total enplanements
- 24,666 total operations
 - 628 air carrier operations
 - 2,557 air taxi operations
 - 11,717 itinerant general aviation operations
 - 1,333 itinerant military operations
 - 7,539 local general aviation operations
 - 892 local military operations

The FAA Form 5010-1, Airport Master Record shows the Airport had 86 based aircraft in 2023.

Table 1-0 Forecast Summaries presents forecasts of enplanements, aircraft operations, and based aircraft at GYY from the 2022 Master Plan Update. These forecasts were developed based on past and existing operations at the time of the Master Plan Update, and did not consider air cargo development as a contributing factor. Two forecasts were developed in the Master Plan Update and are presented in the table: a Base Forecast and a High Scenario Forecast. The Base Forecast was prepared to characterize modest growth in aviation activity, while the High Scenario Forecast was prepared to reflect a more optimistic set of growth assumptions. The FAA approved the Base Forecast.

1.5 Major Federal Actions and Determination of the Level of NEPA Review

The FAA actions, determinations, and approvals necessary for this project to proceed include the following:

- Determination that environmental analysis prerequisites associated with any future Airport Improvement Program (AIP) and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding associated with the Proposed Action have been fulfilled pursuant to 49 United States Code § 47101-47144.
- Conditional Approval of the future Airport Layout Plan (ALP) to depict those portions of the Proposed Action subject to FAA review and approval pursuant to 49 United States Code § 47107(a)(16)(B).
- The FAA is preparing an environmental assessment (EA) to evaluate the reasonably foreseeable effects of the proposed actions on the quality of the human environment.

This EA is prepared under the requirements of Title V of Public Law 97-248 of the Airport and Airway Improvement Act of 1982, NEPA, U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Order 5610.1D, *DOT's Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts* (July 3, 2025), FAA Order 1050.1G, and to the extent applicable, FAA Order 5050.4B, *National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Instructions for Airport Actions* (April 2006).

The intent of this EA is to provide the environmental documentation necessary to assist the FAA decisionmaker with the evaluation of the proposed action at GYY. This EA evaluates the proposed action and a reasonable range of alternatives that may meet the purpose and need. The analysis also identifies and discusses measures to mitigate possible environmental impacts. The FAA must evaluate this EA under NEPA and, if the project does not have the potential for significant impacts, a Finding of No Significant

Impact (FONSI) may be issued, or if it does have significant impacts, they must prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

Table 1-0 Forecast Summaries							
	Actual	Forecast			Average Annual Growth Rate		
	2015	2020	2025	2035	2015-2020	2020-2025	2025-2035
Base Forecast							
Passenger Enplanements	2,547	9,500	17,000	27,000	30.1%	12.3%	4.7%
Air Carrier	2,458	9,167	16,404	26,054	30.1	12.3	4.7
Commuter	89	333	595	945	30.1	12.3	4.7
Aircraft Operations	25,229	26,322	26,648	27,263	0.9%	0.2%	0.2%
Commercial Operations	1,748	1,920	1,995	2,145	1.9	0.8	0.7
Air Carrier	494	600	650	750	4.0	1.6	1.4
Commuter/Air Taxi	1,254	1,320	1,345	1,395	1.0	0.4	0.4
General Aviation	21,500	22,422	22,673	23,138	0.8	0.2	0.2
Military	1,981	1,980	1,980	1,980	(0.0.)	-	-
Based Aircraft	97	135	140	145	6.8%	0.7%	0.4%
High Scenario							
Passenger Enplanements	2,547	100,000	200,000	350,000	108.4%	14.9%	5.8%
Air Carrier	2,458	99,667	199,404	349,054	109.7	14.9	5.8
Commuter	89	333	595	945	30.1	12.3	4.7
Aircraft Operations	25,229	32,298	40,286	49,781	5.1%	4.5%	2.1%
Commercial Operations	1,748	3,123	4,385	6,247	12.3	7.0	3.6
Air Carrier	494	1,803	3,040	4,852	29.5	11.0	4.8
Commuter/Air Taxi	1,254	1,320	1,345	1,395	1.0	0.4	0.4
General Aviation	21,500	27,195	33,921	41,555	4.8	4.5	2.1
Military	1,981	1,980	1,980	1,980	(0.0.)	-	-
Based Aircraft	97	160	200	245	10.5%	4.6%	2.1%

Source: Gary/Chicago International Airport Master Plan Update, 2022, Prepared by Jacobsen I Daniels