

## **FAQ: Proposed Regional General Aviation Airport in Richmond Hill**

- 1. What is a general aviation (GA) airport?** A general aviation (GA) airport is a public-use airport that primarily supports non-scheduled, non-commercial civil aviation activities. According to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), it handles operations such as private and recreational flying, corporate/business travel, flight training, aerial surveys, emergency medical services (e.g., medevac), agricultural support, and law enforcement flights. These airports are designed for smaller aircraft, such as single-engine piston planes, light jets, helicopters, and ultralights. In the U.S., there are over 5,000 such airports, making them the most common type and key contributors to local economies through jobs, tourism, and accessibility.
- 2. What is not a general aviation airport?** A GA airport is not a commercial service airport, which the FAA defines as one accommodating scheduled passenger or cargo flights with at least 2,500 annual passenger boardings (or, in some cases, a minimum number of cargo operations). Commercial airports (e.g., major hubs like Atlanta's ATL or regional hubs like SAV) prioritize high-volume airline operations with large jets, extensive security screening, and passenger-focused amenities like gates, baggage claim, and customs facilities. GA airports typically do not handle these, as their traffic is unscheduled, and payment (if any) is not for public transportation services—corporate flights, for instance, count as GA even if business-related. Additionally, GA airports are not military air bases (used for defense operations) or private airstrips (restricted to non-public use). They are also not designed for the high noise and congestion of commercial jets, often serving quieter, smaller aircraft instead.
- 3. How have advancements in aviation technology and infrastructure impacted the role of general aviation airports?** Dramatic advances in aviation technology have resulted in aircraft that are safer, faster, more efficient, quieter, and more environmentally friendly. Airports and air navigation systems have also progressed significantly from the early grass airstrips and bonfire beacons. Today, a sophisticated fleet of civil aircraft in the United States, predominantly general aviation (non-airline, non-military), leverages satellite and other advanced technologies to transport passengers, freight, mail, and supplies to communities nationwide, connecting urban hubs with rural outposts and many towns in between. General aviation airports serve as critical infrastructure to support vibrant, growing communities.
- 4. Will it be safe for our community, and what rules will pilots follow given the airport will not have a control tower?** Safety is the cornerstone of aviation, encompassing pilots, aircraft, and ground operations at airports. Compared to other forms of transportation, aviation is remarkably safe, including the airports themselves. Everyone involved in a flight—pilots, maintenance crews, dispatchers, aircraft manufacturers, airport-based operators, flight operations teams, air traffic controllers, and others—follows strict FAA regulations. These rules cover everything from the altitudes that planes can fly to schedules for aircraft inspections and maintenance. Even at smaller airports without control towers, pilots adhere to FAA guidelines that dictate takeoff and

landing procedures, communication between pilots, and numerous other regulations that have kept U.S. skies and airports safe for years. Residents and workers near airports can feel confident that aircraft operators, whether based locally or passing through, are fully committed to ensuring the airport remains a safe and secure part of the community.

5. **Is the proposed top site along Highway 17 eligible to be considered for an airport given its proximity to nearby airports and restricted airspace?** Yes. Holt Consulting, an aviation consulting firm, in collaboration with a runway alignment expert, set the alignment in their Site Selection Study to enable safe use of the airport. Holt has completed numerous airport projects ranging in size, cost, and complexity at small general aviation airports and large commercial service airports. Holt's professionals brought broad expertise in planning, environmental analysis, design, construction, and management services, including pre-applications and applications for state and federal assistance.
6. **What noise can be expected?** Aircraft, like cars, trucks, and trains, generate noise in communities, particularly along the Highway 17 corridor. While airports inherently produce some noise, the proposed airport is designed exclusively for general aviation, serving private and corporate aircraft, flight training, and emergency services—not commercial airliners or military jets. The noise often heard from larger aircraft at Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport (SAV) is associated with commercial and military operations, which are not the focus of this project. General aviation aircraft, such as small private planes and corporate jets, typically produce significantly less noise, minimizing impact on the surrounding community. Many communities recognize that the economic and social advantages of having a local airport far outweigh the minimal disturbances.
7. **Why does Richmond Hill need a general aviation airport?** Richmond Hill lacks dedicated general aviation facilities, forcing pilots and businesses to rely on distant or congested airports like Savannah/Hilton Head International, which prioritizes commercial, cargo, and military operations. The proposed airport will provide local access for aviation, support workforce development through flight training, enable emergency response capabilities, and attract corporate headquarters to drive economic growth. For the thousands of communities served exclusively by general aviation – and this means business aviation, law enforcement flying, agricultural application, and air medical services– their local airport is an essential community asset, providing significant economic and quality-of-life benefits. For example:

**Economic Multiplier Effect:** Business aircraft travel to and from local airports across the country every day, bringing thousands of marketing, professional, technical, service, and support staff efficiently and quickly to their destination. These individuals, in turn, spend money in the local economy, stay in local hotels, and eat at nearby restaurants, and create what's known as the economic "multiplier effect" in the area.

**Essential Access:** The ability to move people and goods quickly to and from airports has tangible benefits for everyone, not just air travelers.

**Competitive Advantage:** Airports help keep existing employers in a community and attract new ones to a region because companies value the transportation and competitive business advantages offered by general aviation airports. Business developers look for ready access to air transportation when they make decisions on where to locate new businesses and facilities.

**Lifesaving Services:** The airport will facilitate critical operations like medical evacuations, disaster response, and supply delivery, especially important in a region prone to hurricanes. General aviation airports are vital for community resilience during a crisis. Emergency medical services and air ambulance operators provide critically injured people with timely access to specialized medical treatment through airlift operations, organ transports and more. Volunteer “Angel Flights” regularly transport sick patients to distant medical facilities for treatment.

**Agricultural Services:** Agricultural aircraft operators treat crops and sow seeds via aerial application.

**Recreational Benefits:** Many thousands of Americans fly their own airplanes for pleasure as well as business, positively impacting the local economy.

8. **What are the key features of the proposed airport?** The airport will be built on 300 acres and include a 6,700-foot runway, pad sites for aircraft tie-downs, 14 large hangars, and 64 T-hangars. A T-hangar is an efficient space for small planes. It will support private and corporate flights, flight training programs, and emergency operations, managed by the Richmond Hill-Bryan County Airport Authority.
9. **How will the airport benefit the local economy?** The airport is expected to create jobs during construction and ongoing operations (e.g., maintenance, fixed-base operator services, fuel management), stimulate local businesses through visitor spending, and attract corporate headquarters by offering convenient aviation access. Georgia’s general aviation sector contributes \$4.4 billion annually to the state’s \$73.7 billion aviation economy, and Richmond Hill can capture a share of this impact.
10. **What is the estimated investment directly related to the project, and how will it be funded?** An estimated \$183 million will be directly invested in land, infrastructure, and facilities, including privately funded facilities. The project will primarily use federal grants from the FAA’s Airport Improvement Program (AIP) and Airport Infrastructure Grants (AIG) for federally funded eligible items, which generally require a 5% match provided by the Airport Authority. This match will be funded through revenue bonds issued by the Richmond Hill-Bryan County Airport Authority, repaid via operational revenues, ensuring no direct burden on taxpayers. Vertical assets such as the FBO and hangars will be built with private funding utilizing ground leases between the private party and the Authority.
11. **What are revenue bonds, and how will they be repaid?** Revenue bonds are loans secured by future airport revenues, not general tax dollars. The bonds will be issued

solely on the credit of the Airport Authority as GA House Bill 763 specifies that the Airport Authority cannot place debt services requirements on the city or county. Repayment will come from operational income, including ground leases for hangars, fixed-base operator (FBO) fees, fuel farm flowage fees, tie-down fees, landing charges, and concessions. This model ensures fiscal responsibility and self-sufficiency.

12. **Will the airport increase local taxes?** No. The local match for federal grants will be funded by the Airport Authority via revenue bonds, repaid solely by airport-generated revenues like leases and fees, not through tax increases.
13. **What role will the airport play in education and workforce development?** The airport will host flight training programs, creating pathways to aviation careers and addressing skill shortages in a high-demand industry. It will also offer youth aviation camps and STEM-focused programs to inspire the next generation to love aviation as so many do in our community.
14. **How will the airport impact local businesses and tourism?** Aviators and visitors using the airport will boost local businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, and retail, through increased spending. The airport will also enhance Richmond Hill's appeal as a destination for tourism and trade within the Southeast.
15. **What measures ensure the project's financial sustainability?** Revenue projections indicate sufficient demand to cover bond repayments, with conservative estimates accounting for growth in general aviation. The Airport Authority will structure bonds with reserve funds and covenants to mitigate risks and ensure long-term viability.
16. **How does this project align with Georgia's aviation strategy?** Georgia's airports generate \$73.7 billion in annual economic impact and support 450,500 jobs. The Richmond Hill airport complements this ecosystem by addressing underserved general aviation needs, enhancing regional connectivity, and contributing to statewide economic growth.
17. **Who is overseeing the project?** The Richmond Hill-Bryan County Airport Authority, established in 2025 via Georgia House Bill 763, is responsible for planning, developing, and managing the airport, ensuring transparent implementation and community engagement.
18. **What are the next steps for the project?** The Airport Authority and the Georgia Department of Transportation will finalize feasibility studies, secure federal grants, and the Airport Authority will issue revenue bonds. Community outreach and stakeholder engagement will continue to build support, with construction timelines dependent on funding and approvals.
19. **Will there be an environmental assessment completed for the proposed project?** Yes. An environmental assessment (EA) is a required step in the development process. This concise document will describe the anticipated environmental impacts of the proposed

action and determine whether it has the potential to significantly affect the human environment. The EA defines the project's purpose and need, analyzes the potential impacts of the project and alternatives, demonstrates compliance with other executive orders and environmental laws, and allows for public participation when applicable. It may also include mitigation measures to avoid, eliminate, or reduce anticipated impacts. The following environmental impact categories will be evaluated: Air Quality, Biological Resources (including fish, wildlife, and plants), Climate, Coastal Resources, Department of Transportation Act Section 4(f), Farmland, Hazardous Materials, Solid Waste, and Pollution Prevention, Historical, Architectural, Archeological, and Cultural Resources, Land Use, Natural Resources and Energy Supply, Noise and Compatible Land Use, Socioeconomic, Environmental Justice, Children's Environmental Health, and Safety Risks, Visual Effects (including light emissions), and Water Resources (including wetlands, floodplains, surface waters, groundwater, and wild and scenic rivers).

20. **How can the community get involved or learn more?** Residents and stakeholders can engage with the Richmond Hill-Bryan County Airport Authority through public meetings, updates, and feedback sessions. To contact the Authority, email [airport@bryancountyga.gov](mailto:airport@bryancountyga.gov).
21. **Will the airport serve commercial or military aircraft, and will it increase noise in the area?** The proposed airport is designed exclusively for general aviation, serving private and corporate aircraft, flight training, and emergency services—not commercial airliners or military jets. The noise often heard from larger aircraft at Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport (SAV) is associated with commercial and military operations, which are not the focus of this project. General aviation aircraft, such as small private planes and corporate jets, typically produce significantly less noise, minimizing impact on the surrounding community.
22. **How will the airport impact the local tax base?** The airport is projected to generate approximately \$2 million annually in ad valorem taxes on real and personal property, contributing positively to the local tax base. This additional revenue, driven by taxes on aircraft and privately built vertical structures supporting the airport, will help offset existing tax burdens, particularly those reliant on property taxes from homeowners, supporting fiscal relief for the community. Indirect benefits like sales tax, hotel taxes, and general local spending have not been calculated or included in the \$2 million estimate.
23. **How are aircraft taxed at the local level?** The determination of whether an aircraft is taxed by a county tax commissioner in Georgia, for example, hinges on its status as tangible personal property and its situs, or primary location, within the county. The county tax commissioner assesses ad valorem taxes on aircraft based on their fair market value, as determined by state guidelines, typically using valuation resources like the Aircraft Bluebook or comparable sales data. For an aircraft to be taxable, it must be physically located in the county for a significant portion of the tax year (e.g., January 1 is often the assessment date in Georgia). The owner must report the aircraft on a personal property tax return, detailing its make, model, year, and other specifications. The tax commissioner verifies the information, calculates the tax based on the county's millage

rate, and issues a tax bill, ensuring compliance with state and local regulations.

24. **Does the location that an owner uses for registering the aircraft with the FAA impact where a plane is taxed?** No. Registration location does not impact the ability to assess ad valorem taxes. Aircraft owners may choose to register an aircraft in certain states for matters unrelated to the tax commissioner's ability to assess taxes.
25. **What is the Georgia Department of Transportation's role and the Southeast Georgia Regional System Plan Update?** The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT), in collaboration with Kimley-Horn, is updating the Southeast Georgia Regional System Plan. This update evaluates all airports in the region and projects next steps. The plan will guide GDOT in determining if a new airport is needed. For more information, contact [SESsystemPlan@dot.ga.gov](mailto:SESsystemPlan@dot.ga.gov).
26. **Is this airport designed for Hyundai cargo planes?** No. There have been no discussions about handling cargo planes for Hyundai. For reference, Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport (SAV) is investing in a \$400 million infrastructure upgrade, including a 36-acre cargo campus set to be completed in spring 2026. This expansion at SAV is designed to support the region's growing economic and logistics needs, featuring two new cargo facilities to accommodate tenants like UPS and FedEx.
27. **How are members of the Airport Authority appointed?** Georgia House Bill 763 prescribes that appointments are made by the County Commission (three appointments, including the county manager), the City Council (three appointments, including the city manager), and the local legislative delegation of state House and Senate members (four appointments). The City Council and County Commission rotate one additional appointment. All members appointed must complete a conflict of interest form and disclose any actual conflicts.