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EDITORIAL

# Hyannis airport plan hits turbulence

Expanding the Cape Cod Gateway Airport could be a good idea, but backers need to show it'll help address the region's transportation needs.

By [The Editorial Board](#) Updated September 16, 2023, 4:00 a.m.



Hyannis area residents and business owners who rely on the Cape Cod Gateway Airport are at odds over the \$22 million proposed expansion of one of the airport's runways. VINCENT ALBAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

With [Governor Maura Healey pushing](#) to replace both Cape Cod bridges, construction and closures could make the Cape's [congested traffic situation](#) worse in the not-too-distant future, highlighting the need for transportation alternatives in the region.

At first glance, a proposed \$22 million expansion of one of the runways at the Cape Cod Gateway Airport in Hyannis might seem like it could help address those needs by drawing in some travelers who would otherwise drive. But the controversial proposal needs to be properly weighed against other alternatives.

As the Globe [reported recently](#), many Cape residents oppose the expansion and feel the project will only benefit those who can afford private or charter air travel — currently the airport's main business.

“This project is only beneficial to a few corporations and affluent citizens!” [a Barnstable resident](#) wrote during the proposal's public comment period. “You are trying to make a profit and you are saying it is good for our neighborhood and good for Cape Cod. It is not! It's good for people that have a huge mansion out here and come out once a year for maybe a week, but it is not good for the communities,” a West Yarmouth resident said during a [June public hearing](#), where no residents voiced support for the project during the hour-and-a-half community speaking period.

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Indeed, less than 1 percent of the Hyannis airport’s operations are commercial air carrier flights like JetBlue, according to recent [FAA data](#). The airport saw less than [30,000 commercial passengers last year](#) — a 93 percent drop since 2007. Two of the airport’s four airlines have pulled out in recent years, leaving just JetBlue and Cape Air in Hyannis. These losses have been exacerbated by a shortage of pilots and mechanics, and competition from high-speed ferries, according to airport leadership. The vast majority of the airport’s remaining traffic is made up of charter, corporate, and private flights.

Neighbors say they don’t want the extra noise just to accommodate private jets — who would? And if a proposal only results in more of that kind of high-end business, it would do nothing to solve bigger access issues on the Cape; it’s a good bet that very few travelers are choosing between a private jet or the Sagamore Bridge.

And so Barnstable Town Councilor Betty Ludtke is calling for a regional transit study that would investigate more proposals before construction starts on the proposed runway expansion. “Is [the expansion] worth all of the impacts on the folks that live here? Is it a valid trade off?” Ludtke said in an interview with the editorial board.

Taking stock of all the options — and not just runway expansion — makes sense. That's not to say the project should be ruled out: The airport argues that the expansion will help it attract commercial flights, and that might well prove true. It could also provide an economic boost; the airport already employs more than 1,700 workers, according to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation. But there needs to be a market analysis showing a reasonable likelihood that an expansion will attract more flights, not an if-you-build-it-they-will-come hunch.

Especially with growing environmental concerns about the climate impact of planes — and, in particular, private jets — any airport expansion proposal needs careful scrutiny. The airport expansion in Hyannis could well be a smart move, but the onus should be on proponents to prove it.

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