



## Chapter 4 Falcon Field Airport

### 4-1 History of Falcon Field Airport

In 1940, the United Kingdom was deeply entrenched in war with Germany. Two issues were pressing to Winston Churchill and the British: 1) Lack of trained pilots and 2) Airfields to train the recruits. Churchill turned to the United States to help them with these problems. In response the US military designated seven airfields to train Royal Air Force (RAF) pilots. Since the United States was technically neutral to the war in Europe at this time, the RAF pilots were sent by trains to the Arizona desert in civilian clothing to avoid drawing attention.

Construction of the airfield commenced on July 17, 1941, roughly 7 miles from the City of Mesa boundary at the time. City Engineer, E.B. Tucker, conducted a contest to name the field. It was from this contest that the name “Falcon Field” was chosen. Some of the other entries were Superstition Field, Saguaro Field, and Sun Valley Field.

The training was to be conducted by Southwest Airways (no connection to present-day Southwest Airlines). In fact, the flying falcon on the Falcon Field logo came from the shoulder patches on Southwest Airways uniforms. To pay for the training, the British government was charged \$21.60 for primary training, \$32.70 for basic training, and \$25 a month for room and board. More than 1,500 pilots trained in the skies over Mesa until September 11, 1945 when the last of the RAF pilots left for England.

After the war was over, the airfield was turned over to the City of Mesa for one dollar. The City of Mesa technically did not have the Falcon Field Airport inside the city boundary until 1978 when it was annexed into the city. The remainder of the territory came into the City of Mesa in a series of seven annexations that spanned the years of 1978-1984. Another milestone for this area is also in the year 1984 - this is when the first AH-64 Apache Attack Helicopter rolled out of the Hughes Helicopter factory. Hughes Helicopter eventually became Boeing, providing an anchor for the area as an aviation center for the entire Phoenix area.

Sixty-five years after the initial construction, Mesa’s Falcon Field Airport ranked among the nation’s “top 10” general aviation airports in terms of based aircraft and handles more than 270,000 flight operations annually (Falcon Field Employment Center Strategy Plan). Falcon Field Airport ranked third in terms of economic impact in the state of Arizona behind Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport and Tucson International Airport.

### 4-2 Surrounding Areas

Located in North East Mesa, the Falcon Field Airport enjoys advantageous access to views of Red Mountain, the Red Mountain Freeway (Loop 202), and US-60. On the east, west, and southwest, airport operations are limited, but not impeded by existing single-family residential development. This essential and scarce operational space will have to be carefully protected for its current and future operations.

Of particular note is the proximity of the airport to the Citrus Sub-Area. Buffering of its existing residential areas will need to be a consideration for future airport operations and area development. In particular, consideration will need to be given in relation to land use impacts, activity based impacts, and the preservation of the character of this neighboring Sub-Area.

The airport also enjoys proximity to a large amount of vacant land that is mostly planned and zoned for industrial and business park uses. The majority of this land is on the airport property, immediately to the west, and to the north. This is an asset that permits tremendous future opportunity to influence the character of the area. This also presents a tremendous opportunity for direct and indirect economic and business linkages that can generate a large number of jobs.

Existing industrial developments, such as Boeing, have a strong association with the airport, providing a number of economic anchors that will ensure the long-term viability of the airport. However, retail and services establishments necessary to serve the area have only begun to develop in recent years, occupying land to the south of the airport.

### 4-3 Falcon Field Airport Master Plan





Airport master plans are essential to establish a long-term physical and operational development program that will result in safe, efficient, and environmentally sound facilities and activity patterns. These plans ensure the highest and best use of scarce airport land. The existence of a plan will also result in an increased likelihood of future, neighboring land uses that are compatible with an airport, while preserving compatibility of airport operations with existing, nearby land uses.

The current Mesa-Falcon Field Airport Master Plan was prepared by Coffman Associates, Inc. in September of 1992. Understanding the current and projected needs for various airport facilities is essential to creating a physical development program. It is, therefore, essential that this plan be updated. The airport recently received a federal grant of \$170,000 to help fund the completion of a new master plan update.

The 1992 programmed improvements of the Mesa-Falcon Field Airport Master Plan were scheduled in three phases:

- Stage I Development ( FY 1993 – 1998);
- Stage II Development (FY 1998 – 2002); and
- Stage III Development (FY 2002 – 2015).

Much of Stage I, Parts of Stage II, and Parts of Stage III have been completed. Uncompleted portions of the program are dependent on the acquisition of private land immediately adjacent to the airport property. Among the uncompleted projects that were not dependent on land acquisitions were the extensions of runways 4R and 22L. However, the decision has been made not to extend those runways. Completed projects have included the various taxiway extensions, miscellaneous taxiway widening projects, tie-down apron expansion, and hangar construction.

#### **4-4 Airport Land**

More than 100 acres are available for development on Falcon Field Airport. The property is now being listed and marketed through a broker. Infrastructure is being planned to provide direct taxiway access to virtually every location on the Airport. These vacant holdings may be leased and improved with aviation related businesses.

There is also airport owned property that is located across the street at the northwest and southwest corners

of McKellips and Greenfield Roads. Due to the lack of aviation value for the majority of the parcel at the northwest corner of McKellips and Greenfield Roads, the City of Mesa will be requesting a release from the Federal Aviation Administration to change the land use from aeronautical to non-aeronautical use.

#### **4-5 Summary of Issues and Opportunities**

- Access to a strong regional transportation network may be leveraged to economically strengthen the airport and surrounding areas.
- Nearby residential areas and other sensitive land uses will need to be protected from any increase in impact associated with airport operations and surrounding development.
- Valuable airport operational space will need to be preserved and protected from incompatible land uses.
- Appropriately zoned vacant land near the airport provides an immense opportunity for economic development and business linkages to the airport.
- Secondary services, such as retail, dining, and lodging, are generally lacking and are needed to support airport related activity and businesses.
- The Falcon Field Airport Master Plan is outdated, and no longer reflects the contextual needs and constraints facing the airport.
- Airport owned property provides the potential opportunity for controlled development of both aviation and non-aviation related establishments.

