

# Regional Aviation Strategic Plan and San Diego Airport Multimodal Accessibility Plan

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**SANDAG**

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# Regional Aviation Strategic Plan and San Diego Airport Multimodal Accessibility Plan

Airports are key parts of the transportation system, connecting communities to regional, national, and global economies. In 2007, California passed Senate Bill 10 (Kehoe, 2007) to encourage better long-term planning for airports. The goal was to improve coordination between local and regional transportation plans, promote teamwork among agencies, and ensure consistency among airport plans. This law led to the creation of two key plans: the Regional Aviation Strategic Plan and the San Diego Airport Multimodal Accessibility Plan.

## Regional Aviation Strategic Plan

California state law requires the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority to advance strategies for regional aviation system in coordination with SANDAG. The Airport Authority fulfills that statutory role through the [Regional Aviation Strategic Plan](#) (RASP), initially prepared in 2011 with an Implementation Report in 2021. The aim of the RASP is to preserve and extend the utility of San Diego International Airport as the primary commercial service airport in the region while alleviating further stress on airports in the greater Los Angeles metropolitan region that also experience chronic demand.

To accomplish these objectives, the 2021 RASP identified five scenarios to optimize the broader functioning of the regional aviation system; the 2025 status of each of those scenarios is summarized below.

### Commercial Service Enhancement

The San Diego International Airport offers service to over 90 year-round or seasonal nonstop destinations, including international routes to Asia, Canada, Europe, and Latin America. In 2024, they served just over 25.2 million passengers and is on pace to exceed that amount in 2025.

McClellan-Palomar Airport in Carlsbad has added commercial service flights to Las Vegas, Oakland, Phoenix, and Scottsdale. McClellan-Palomar Airport served approximately 20,000 passengers in 2024 and is on pace to increase in 2025.

### Utilization of Tijuana Airport

The Cross Border Xpress, a pedestrian skybridge connecting Tijuana International Airport to San Diego, augments route options to over 40 Mexican (domestic) destinations, two U.S. destinations (Las Vegas, Phoenix), and Beijing, China. This service allows ticketed passengers to connect from the U.S. side of the border and fly out of Tijuana. In 2024 the Cross Border Xpress served 5 million passengers. In 2024 the Cross Border Xpress served approximately 5 million ticketed passengers, a portion of the 12.5 million air passengers served by Tijuana Airport.

## Coordination with High-Speed Rail

Current construction on the California High Speed Rail segment through California's Central Valley is planned to eventually connect with the San Diego region in Phase 2 of their efforts. The high-speed rail system planned for California will eventually encompass over 800 miles of rail, with up to 24 stations. Phase 2 refers to future program extensions from Merced to Sacramento and from Los Angeles to San Diego via the Inland Empire. These extensions will offer passengers rail connections to the Greater Los Angeles region and San Francisco Bay Area, with options to Las Vegas and Phoenix via private high-speed networks. Downtown San Diego and San Diego International Airport are intended stops in this passenger rail network. The California High-Speed Rail Authority has not officially indicated a final completion date for the full system. Phase 2 is in the early planning stages and would be constructed after Phase 1 is complete.

## General Aviation Airport Optimization

Optimizing general aviation in the region helps manage capacity at San Diego International Airport by offering passengers alternative airports for their travels. While all the airports in San Diego County experienced a decline in airport operations post pandemic, some airports have bounced back quicker than others.

In 2024:

- McClellan-Palomar Airport had the most annual flight operations since 2008 and a roughly 20% increase since 2019.
- Ramona Airport saw a roughly 19% increase in annual flight operations compared to 2019.
- Gillespie Field in El Cajon has seen a roughly 21% decline in annual airport operations, largely due to the decrease of student pilots from Asia and Europe who have been slow to return to the U.S. post-COVID.
- Brown Field flight operations continued to remain stable, typically +/- 3% since 2009.

In recent years, Montgomery-Gibbs Executive Airport in northern San Diego has increased flight operations and is now the third busiest general aviation airport in the country.

## Air Freight Optimization

Package delivery companies base local operations at the San Diego International Airport because of its proximity to demand markets and sorting infrastructure. Brown Field in southern San Diego has occasional service of air carrier-sized (>60 passengers) aircraft, but the terrain setting and airspace complications make it unavailable for all-weather operations.

## San Diego Airport Multimodal Accessibility Plan

SANDAG's 2012 San Diego Airport Multimodal Accessibility Plan (AMAP), included in [San Diego Forward: The 2021 Regional Plan](#), focuses on ground access to regional airports in cooperation with the Airport Authority and their RASP. In particular, the [Airport Transit Connection](#) project is being planned to create a direct link between the San Diego International Airport and our region's transit system.

## Airport Transit Connection

The Airport Transit Connection (ATC) to San Diego International Airport will be integrated with many existing and future travel options in San Diego's urban core, including rapid and local bus services, shuttles, regional rail, and Trolley, along with new safety improvements for walking and biking.

Connected transportation options will make it easier for people to navigate the region—and access the airport—without relying on a car. This project will provide residents and visitors with:

- Convenient access to airport terminals and local amenities
- Equitable and reliable options that connect San Diego's urban core to the surrounding region
- A more seamless and stress-free experience when using transit to reach the airport

Planning efforts to date have identified multiple potential Airport Transit Connection concepts. Information about these concepts can be found in SANDAG's [Airport Transit Connection Concept Evaluation Study](#). Advanced planning work is underway to evaluate which ATC concepts are the most feasible and the best fit for the San Diego region prior to beginning the environmental analysis phase.