

## **From Runways to Roadmaps: A New Strategic Plan Unifies Truckee Tahoe Airport District**

By Tiffany Connolly

Something feels different at the Truckee Tahoe Airport District (TTAD), and it's not the incredible daily food special at Red Truck Café. It's a new focus for the District—one that prioritizes the needs of our evolving community and airport.

Since its inception in 1958, the Truckee Tahoe Airport District (TTAD) has spent most of its history and energy narrowly focused on general aviation services and facilities.

That changed about 10 years ago, as the District shifted focus to engage the community on a wide range of non-traditional aviation fronts, leading to a variety of partnerships to support nonprofits and community events. This was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the airport offered large outdoor hangars to act as meeting spaces.

Today, the airport is again channeling their priorities and funds based on the dynamic landscape of the community and airport. "By grounding the Airport District in transparent processes, public outreach, and following the requirements of both the California Special Districts Association and Federal Aviation Administration for tracking and use of funds, we are operating at a new baseline to best focus our limited resources to benefit both the general aviation and the local community, as outlined in our new Strategic Plan," says Robb Etnyre, TTAD General Manager.

Despite their history, broad operations, and influence, the District had made several attempts but never formerly adopted a final strategic plan to guide its vision, which has led to increasingly complicated decision-making. "Over the past 10 to 15 years, the airport hasn't had a unified vision about how it should be moving forward," says TTAD Director of Aviation Jeff Menasco.

So, when the airport board and staff finally assembled last year to establish a coordinated direction, the process brought to light a surprising fact—the board had a lot more in alignment than they initially thought. Under the guidance of Seana Doherty, Managing Director at Agnew Beck, a women-owned consulting firm, the year-long process culminated in the approval of *Flight Path for Alignment* at the August 23, 2023 TTAD Board meeting, marking the District's inaugural strategic plan.

"The [process of creating the] strategic plan got us all thinking about our values, talking it out, listening to each other. And I think it went a long way to bring us back together and understand why each of us is here," says Kathryn Rohlf, TTAD Board President.

Seana Doherty adds, "There was a lot of perception on the board that they were all different. Through taking our time and having slow, thoughtful conversations and bringing to light the areas of agreement, it turns out that there was much more alignment than their original perception."

The new strategic plan is just one element of a group of plans that steer the District's priorities and decisions, including the Infrastructure Investment Plan, Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan, Airport Master Plan, and others. The plan's goals, mapped out over the next three to five years, are to create alignment between our board and staff; between community values and our priorities; between neighborhoods and pilots (*Flight Path for Alignment*). Four areas of focus—Economic Viability, Operational Efficiency, Natural Resource Conservation, and Social Responsibility—outline goals, strategies, and a work plan with timelines, roles, and responsibilities. The work plan is a living document, updated in real-time as staff and board members engage in budget meetings, future board meetings, and other District planning activities.

Key themes include prioritizing investments in airport infrastructure—taking care of what we have, improving operational efficiencies, partnering for community and environmental benefits, and supporting staff and board development.

With a 2023 budget of \$19M, TTAD sources its funds from airport enterprises, local property taxes, and both state and federal grants. Operating expenses for the 2023 budget are \$17.8M, of which 94% is allocated to airport operations and 6% to community benefits related to the public purpose of an airport.

"The airport has some excellent opportunities to make a difference in the community in a positive way," Kathryn Rohlf says. "We have an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of people who live here."

However, while the plan touches on environmental commitments in Focus Area 4: Natural Resource Conservation, some community members point out that it's not enough.

Bob Belden, a Truckee resident for fifty years, spoke publicly at a July 2023 TTAD Board meeting, stating that air traffic over his Prosser Heights home continues to increase, especially on the weekends: "It's not fun to even be home because of the traffic that's coming over." While the airport has actually seen a 3% decrease in overall traffic over the past few years, jet traffic has increased and now accounts for about 20% of the airport's operations.

The board recognizes that their plan is not perfect, and that there is work to be done internally before they can address every external concern. In a letter at the beginning of the plan, they promise to "stay committed and focused on implementing our collective flight path knowing it will be bumpy; we will need to adjust but we pledge to work together to get to our destination."

Jeff Menasco is hopeful, "The beauty of the strategic plan is... we can put our resources, money, and staff's time toward these already agreed to goals."

In a transformative moment for the Truckee Tahoe Airport District, the approval of their inaugural adopted strategic plan signifies unity and a clear direction for the future. With a commitment to prioritize community values, environmental sustainability, and operational efficiency, the District aims not to expand the airport but to enhance its existing infrastructure for the benefit of both residents and visitors.