

# Policy Brief

## Feasibility of Commercial Air Service at Marathon International Airport

### Background

Marathon International Airport (MTH) currently operates as a general aviation facility, open only to private aircraft and charter services. Historically, the airport supported limited commercial service, but airlines withdrew due to low passenger demand and insufficient facilities. Today, Key West International Airport (EYW) serves as the only commercial airport in the Lower Keys, despite Marathon's comparable runway length (5,008 ft at MTH vs. 5,076 ft at EYW).

### The Opportunity

Marathon's runway length and infrastructure are sufficient for regional jets such as the Embraer E190/E195 or Airbus A220 (the core of budget airlines Breeze Airways' fleet). What Marathon lacks is the regulatory certification, TSA passenger screening, and upgraded terminal facilities needed for scheduled commercial service.

Bringing commercial flights back could:

- Diversify access to the Keys and reduce pressure on Key West's congested airport
- Provide direct revenue to our City through passenger facility charges and landing fees
- Spur indirect economic activity from tourism, dining, lodging, and charter tours

### Requirements

To enable commercial air service, Marathon would need:

1. **FAA Part 139 Certification** – Required for scheduled passenger service
2. **TSA Passenger Screening** – Secure facilities for passenger and baggage checks
3. **Terminal Upgrades** – Boarding areas, baggage handling, and secured zones
4. **Airline Commitment** – Carrier(s) willing to test market viability with limited flights

## Economic Impact Estimate

- **Passenger Facility Charges (PFCs):** At \$4.50 per passenger, even 50,000 annual enplanements would generate ~\$225,000
- **Tourism Spend:** If half those passengers (25,000) are visitors spending an average of \$500 each, that equates to \$12.5 million in new economic activity
- **City Revenues:** While Marathon may not directly control PFCs, indirect revenue benefits include higher sales tax collections, vacation rental occupancy, and business activity

## Pros

- Expanded travel accessibility for residents and tourists
- Diversifies our local economy and strengthens Marathon's position as a destination
- Reduces reliance on Key West International, alleviating congestion

## Cons

- Upfront capital requirements for TSA facilities and certification
- Risk of low passenger demand leading airlines to withdraw again
- Potential community concerns about noise and traffic impacts

## Recommendation

The City of Marathon should commission a Commercial Air Service Feasibility Study in partnership with the FAA, FDOT, and Monroe County. The study should:

- Assess demand projections for limited commercial service
- Estimate capital costs for facility upgrades and TSA compliance
- Engage potential airline partners like Breeze Airways for initial service commitments

## Conclusion

It's been 16 years since we've had commercial air travel from our airport. New airlines, such as Breeze Airways, are looking to make their mark in point-to-point travel at destination cities. Marathon's airport is technically capable of supporting the same types of aircraft that serve Key West, and that could accommodate an airline such as Breeze. The difference is not runway length, but regulatory and facility readiness. Exploring commercial service through a feasibility study would position Marathon for future growth, improve accessibility, and generate significant economic benefits for the community including alternate sources of revenue beyond property tax rate increases.

Read more at: <https://www.gregformarathon.com/>