

Opinion

## Our View: Keep RFD flying high and ground Peotone



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An Air Transport International cargo plane takes off Friday, Sept. 9, 2016, from Chicago Rockford International Airport. [MAX GERSH/RRSTAR.COM]

**By The Editorial Board / Rockford Register Star**

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Chicago Rockford International Airport continues to be an amazing success story not just for the city but for the region and the state.

RFD was named the world's fastest-growing cargo airport in 2018 among airports that handled more than 250 metric tons of air cargo, according to a report from Airports Council International. The airport's growing partnership with Amazon, and with its longtime tenant UPS, indicate that RFD will continue to grow. It has the space and the amenities that make it an attractive location.

You would think that Rockford's growth and the continued expansion at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport would show there's no need to invest in, build and develop a third Chicagoland airport.

Think again. The dream of a South Suburban Airport in Peotone, a town of about 4,000 that is 43 miles south of Chicago, remains alive. The dream should have died long ago, but the state of Illinois continues to acquire land and commit dollars to prepare Peotone.

It's a waste. Illinois is not exactly flush with cash, and spending money on an airport that has drawn nearly zero interest from the private sector does not make sense.

The state and federal government have invested heavily in Rockford's airport — and with good reason. The numbers tell the story.

**19:** The airport ranked as the 19th largest for cargo in the nation in 2018, according to Federal Aviation Administration data released in July. RFD was the only Illinois-based airport that expanded its cargo operations in 2018. Chicago's O'Hare Airport experienced a 35% decline in cargo activity. Chicago's decline would indicate that there's no reason to build another cargo airport less than an hour from O'Hare. There's plenty of capacity at O'Hare.

**11%:** Rockford cargo growth from 2018 to 2019.

**2.3 billion:** Pounds of cargo that traveled through Rockford in 2019. The amount has tripled in the past five years.

**250,000:** The number of travelers who passed through the airport in 2019, the largest annual total ever and a 7.5% increase from 2018. The airport is served by two passenger airlines, Allegiant Air and Apple Vacations.

**\$2 billion:** The airport's economic impact is expected to hit that number when the Illinois Department of Transportation releases results of its economic impact analysis of RFD in 2020.

**\$33 million:** The amount of federal funding for improvements at the Rockford airport since 2015.

**4,000:** The number of people employed on RFD property. RFD is now one of Rockford's largest employment hubs with UPS, Amazon, Pinnacle, AAR and others.

**\$8.5 billion:** The price tag for the makeover of terminals at O'Hare that will expand and modernize the airport's passenger facilities. The project is supposed to be completed by 2028.

**\$205.5 million:** The amount the state has allocated for road construction work west of the proposed site of the Peotone airport.

**\$97.3 million:** The cost of land the Illinois Department of Transportation has scooped up since 2002. The state has 5,000 of the 6,000 acres it wants for the project. That's a lot of land sitting idle that could be used for much more realistic projects.

**\$1.6 million:** The amount the Illinois Department of Transportation paid Will County from 2005 through 2019 for lost property tax revenue caused by the acquisition of land for the South Suburban Airport.

**0:** The number of airlines or cargo companies that have expressed an interest in Peotone.

**Quote:** "The international recognition of RFD's growth and productivity — it all demonstrates what everybody here already knows, which is: This is a great place to do business. Rockford is a terrific place to do business and we ought to be attracting businesses from all over the country to Rockford."

— Gov. JB Pritzker, Oct. 7, 2019.