

# About Hanscom Field

## Hanscom Field Background

Hanscom Field is the busiest general aviation airport in New England, and the second busiest in terms of total flight operations. Hanscom had 122,216 operations in 2022, compared with 378,613 operations at Logan Airport. A very small fraction (less than 1%) of Hanscom operations are military flights from [Hanscom Air Force Base](#). Hanscom is located on about 1200 acres.

Hanscom Field was created in the 1940's by the Massachusetts legislature with money available to states under a federal airport program. Its creation was controversial even then, passing the legislature by a single vote.

In 1940, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts acquired about 500 acres of land in the towns of Bedford, Concord, Lexington and Lincoln. Legislation established the land as a site for permanently based or fixed-base aircraft operators of flight schools. The site also accommodated the aviation needs of the U.S. Army Air Corps. The airport was then known as the Boston-Bedford Airport.

In 1941, the U.S. Civil Aeronautics Administration finished the construction of the runways and turned over the airport to the Army Air Corps. The airfield was renamed the Laurence G. Hanscom Field and was officially dedicated in 1943. The Enabling Act of 1956 created the Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport) and granted it control of the Commonwealth's land at Hanscom Field; the Air Force continued to lease and operate the airport facilities.

In 1974, Massport assumed control of the operation and maintenance of Hanscom Field and its two runways, and managed it as a general aviation airport.

Besides the limited amount of Military use (<1%), Hanscom has been historically used for small propeller aircraft, some charter operations and, at different points of time, a small amount of commercial passenger service. This began to change in the 1980s as private jets began to emerge as a significant aviation category.

At the current time there is no commercial airline service. A small fraction of the current use is open to the public or serves a public purpose. The remainder of use primarily serves private luxury aircraft operations and recreational fliers.

The primary economic activity at the airport is the lease of commercial property by Massport to tenants and the sale of aircraft fuel. Due to the importation of fuels, the regional economic

benefit of this activity is controversial. Other activities include aircraft maintenance and flight schools.

### Chronological History of Hanscom Field:

1940	Hanscom Field is created against the will of the local communities, by a single vote of the Mass legislature, in order to take advantage of Federal Airport Funds
1944	Air Force takes control of air base for World War II
1957	Mass Port Authority established
1959	Congress establishes Minute Man National Historical Park in order to preserve the site of the birthplace of the American Revolution
1977	Air Force shuts down air base operations and aviation facilities are transferred back to Massport
1978	Master Plan for Hanscom Field establishes Hanscom as a General Aviation Airport and limits aircraft size, and prohibited commercial air carriers and cargo service
1985	Aircraft operations begin rising
1990	Federal Airport Noise and Capacity Act of 1990 eliminates most local regulation of airports in the USA
1990	Local community opposition forms against various airport expansion proposals, and the lack of input that the communities have into the process
1996	Mass Port Authority files environmental impact statement that says a massive expansion of the Airport will have no impact on the communities, despite the outcries and outrage of the community, who submitted contrary evidence and findings that were ignored.
1997	The four towns surrounding Hanscom Field <a href="#">all vote unanimously</a> at their town meetings to protect the surrounding resources and limit the growth of the airport. However, they are powerless to affect the situation
1998	Town officials attempt to work with Massport to put into writing the promises which Massport has made verbally. Massport withdraws from the process, citing pressure from the FAA.
1999	Startup airline Shuttle America proposes to start commercial operations at Hanscom against the expressed wishes of dozens of community organizations and the general public.
1999	As a result of the process violations in the approval of Shuttle America, the four towns file a lawsuit against Massport and Shuttle America
2000	Massport announces record growth in air traffic and ground traffic at Hanscom Field, and proposes to double the Hangar space and traffic. Noise complaints grow over 100% over the previous year.
2001	In the case of the towns vs Shuttle America, Federal appeals court finds in favor of the airline, but warns that future reviews must consider cumulative impacts.
2001	President Clinton issues an order directing the creation of a <a href="#">Federal interagency working group</a> to work to establish long term protections for the National Park.
2002	In a unique show of solidarity, the local towns, state and federal representatives, and community organizations join together to create a position statement <a href="#">"Hanscom at the Crossroads"</a> which requests a moratorium on expansion at Hanscom Field until a regional transportation plan is established.
2003	Massport and FedEx announce <a href="#">plans to initiate heavy cargo operations out of Hanscom Field</a> . The towns object as this is contrary to the Hanscom Field Master Plan.
2003	The historic area around Hanscom Field is <a href="#">designated as one of the 11 Most Endangered Historic Sites in America</a> by the National Trust for Historic preservation, due to the threat from expansion of Hanscom Field.
2003	Scenic America designates the area around Hanscom Field as a threatened <a href="#">"Last Chance Landscape"</a> due to the threats of expansion of Hanscom Field.
2005	Massport and a local developer, Crosspoint, announce plans to expand jet hangar space by 50%. The towns request an environmental review.
2008	Massport requests FAA approval to demolish historic hangar 24 and add 460,000 square feet of jet hangars, doubling the hangar capacity of the airport.
2009	Massport applies for \$9M of Federal Stimulus dollars. Despite <a href="#">protests of congressional representatives</a> , a report to congress citing this expense as an inappropriate use of taxpayer money, and public statements of the Governor that this would not occur, \$3M was granted for paving projects.
2010	Community groups appeal the FAA decision to permit a doubling of jet hangars on the grounds that the review of the impacts on historic sites was inadequate.

Hanscom Field is in a unique location. It is surrounded by historic and natural resources of local, state, and national significance. [View Map](#) Immediately adjacent to the airport are The Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge and the Minuteman National Historical Park. Within the nearby flight paths of the airport are: Walden Pond and Walden Woods, the Concord River, parts of the SUASCO watershed,

Historic Lexington Green, Historic Downtown Concord, The North Bridge, Estabrook Woods Conservation Area, the historic homes of Emerson, Alcott, Hawthorne, and Thoreau, and many dozens of locations on the National Register of Historic Places. These National resources cannot be shielded from airport impacts or relocated. Together, these resources draw millions of tourists per year to Massachusetts and provide a major contribution to the Massachusetts economy.

The only ground access to Hanscom Field is via Rt. 2A (also known as the Battle Road). This road goes right through the National Park and cannot be expanded or modified without the taking of National Park land.

Massport claims that Hanscom is a draw for corporate business executives, and a major contributor to the state economy. In contrast, a [MIT - BankBoston study](#) indicates that *quality of life* is the primary driver of location decisions of High Tech companies, not proximity to private jets, and is, as a result, also a primary driver of the Massachusetts economy:

“when company leaders make a conscious choice about location or expansion, the most important factors are quality of life, proximity to markets, and access to skilled professionals — ahead of low taxes and regulatory environment....

“As one founder explained to us, personal taxes are part of the quality of life for skilled professionals; personal income taxes on managers and engineers out of line with other states could make it hard for businesses to expand. On the other hand, if taxes are lowered at the expense of quality education, cultural facilities, open space, and good transportation, this also lowers the quality of life and would make it harder to recruit skilled people.” (p. 14)

[The economic studies done by Massport](#) indicate that the economic and job contribution to the state is equivalent to that of a small to medium sized software company. The offsetting costs to the economy resulting from impact on tourism, High Tech company location, loss of natural resources, and property value reductions are disproportionate to the contribution. By any measure, growing Hanscom Field is a very poor economic decision for the future.

Massport takes the position that current operations and future plans for Hanscom all have no significant impact on the surrounding natural and historic sites, or on the Climate. In fact, Massport claims that the proposed North Airfield private jet hangar expansion is environmentally beneficial because the the building and ground infrastructure designs would be energy efficient, while remaining silent on the Greenhouse Gas emissions from the aircraft which would tower over gains made by green buildings.

### **Hanscom Future**

Hanscom does not have sufficient land area to become the second regional airport for Massachusetts. Both Massport and the FAA admit this. Therefore, they have not proposed such use. Massport has in the past admitted that Hanscom has poor ground access which also limits its expansion possibilities. However, immediately adjacent to Hanscom Field is Hanscom Air Force Base. This base consists of land and additional ground access options which could permit additional Hanscom Expansion. In recent community meetings it became clear that the communities will accept almost any type of use of this land except having Massport acquire it. Therefore, if Hanscom AFB were to close, the communities consider it critical that Massport not end up with this facility. Although the addition of HAFB does not

get Hanscom up to the land area which the FAA considers necessary for a major regional airport, it does bring it closer and places the communities and National Park at extreme risk related to new airport expansion possibilities.

The future of the Hanscom communities and the unique historic, natural, and cultural resources they contain is in question. A long-term plan for the protection of these resources is needed, along with permanent protections to ensure the success of the plan. This is a subject of Local, State, and National interest.

Almost 25% of Logan activities serve the New York area. These connections are in many cases better served by high speed rail. Yet, Massport has no interest in connecting Logan Airport to high speed rail since it is a form of competition for Massport. The support of surrounding airports in adjacent states and the introduction of high speed rail should be part of a regional transportation plan, which has been recommended by the EPA.

### **The Larger National Context**

There are millions of US citizens impacted by airports. The FAA accepts that there are millions of people impacted, but their definition of impacted is absurdly strict and omits the vast majority of people impacted. Aviation interests understood that communities and states were beginning to focus on developing protections from the impact of aviation expansion, and put an end to this through the exaction of **the Airport Noise and Capacity Act of 1990** which stripped the power to limit airport impact away from localities, states, and even airport operators.

There are anti-airport citizens groups around almost every significant airport in the USA. Eventually, these groups will begin to work together on a national agenda. To date, these groups have not been effectively organized vs the extremely organized and effective aviation interest groups, even though the numbers of impacted people are much larger than the numbers constituting well-funded aviation interests. This is primarily because anti-airport groups are grassroots organizations and are disproportionately constituted of poor or minority people.

In the case of threatened resources of National importance, the National Historic Preservation Act and the National Environmental Policy Act are intended to play a role which balances the tremendous power of the FAA, at least in the cases where the FAA is involved with airport development. However, the FAA has taken unilateral rulemaking actions which have exempted most airport development from these other federal laws.

The measurement and mitigation of airport noise is an area in which national work is needed. The FAA has wrested control of airport noise from the EPA and has effectively blocked any development in the areas of understanding or mitigating airport noise. The FAA Reauthorization Act in September 2023 offers an opportunity to introduce and insert alternative and more accurate noise metrics than are currently being used by the FAA today.

[https://saveourheritage.com/Overview\\_of\\_Hanscom.htm](https://saveourheritage.com/Overview_of_Hanscom.htm)