

# 2

## *History and Recent Impacts*

## Chapter 2 Contents

2.1	History of Florida Aviation .....	1
2.2	Previous FASPs .....	1
2.3	COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts .....	2
2.4	Summary .....	3

### Table of Figures

Figure 2-1.	Historical GA Operations and COVID-19 Impacts.....	2
Figure 2-2.	Historical Commercial/Air Taxi Operations and COVID-19 Impacts .....	3

## Chapter 2

### History of Florida Aviation and Recent Impacts

Florida has a rich aviation history that extends more than 100 years and covers not only traditional aircraft flight but also space flight with the activity associated with the Kennedy Space Center. This history has led to a robust system across the state of Florida that has had success through the continued development of aviation system plans that provide guidance. Recent impacts to the aviation industry such as the COVID-19 pandemic and new technologies are acknowledged in this chapter as issues being important to the Florida Aviation System Plan (FASP) 2043.

#### 2.1 History of Florida Aviation

Florida is the historic home to the birthplace of commercial aviation. The 23-minute, 18-mile flight across Tampa Bay in 1914, in Thomas Benoist’s bi-wing seaplane piloted by aviator Tony Jannus with former St. Petersburg Mayor A.C. Pheil as the lone passenger is recognized as the first commercial flight in the world. This inaugural flight laid the earliest foundation for the progressive public-use airport system that today consists of 19 commercial service and 87 general aviation airports.

This system constantly evolves to keep pace with the industry and continue meeting air travel needs for people and cargo, providing flight instruction, and serving as a center for maintenance, repair, and overhaul services. Florida airports are critical in serving communities while responding to disasters, centralizing and transporting people and supplies, and serving as staging areas during crises.

***Florida is home to more than 470 aviation and aerospace companies. Industry giants such as Boeing, Embraer, Lockheed Martin, and Sikorsky conduct major operations here.***



#### 2.2 Previous FASPs

With so many residents, businesses, and visitors depending on the system for these services and with the industry evolving so quickly, the Florida Department of Transportation Aviation Office (FDOT AO) recognizes the importance of regular, frequent planning efforts with the support of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), airport sponsors, and the many communities our airports serve. The FDOT AO focus remains consistent throughout each planning effort—safe, efficient, secure, and convenient operations to meet the needs of all users.

The two most recent system plans for Florida are the *Florida Aviation System Plan 2025*, drafted in 2012, and the *Florida Aviation System Plan 2035*, developed in 2015. While many system plans are updated on a five-to-ten-year timeframe, the FDOT AO furthers its interest in meeting and anticipating the air travel needs of the public in Florida keeping pace with industry change by more frequent, routine updates to its

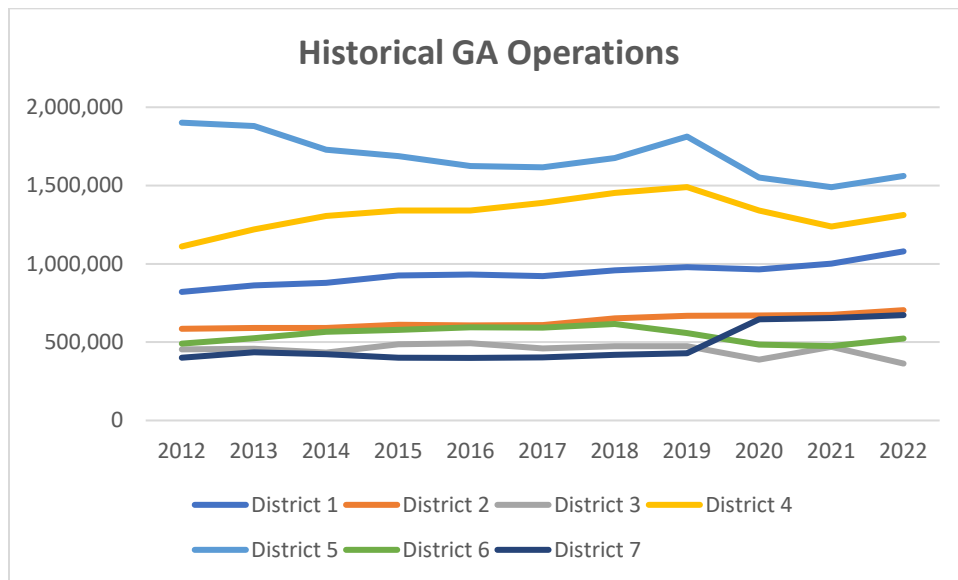
system plan. Each new plan provides the opportunity to assess previous goals and objectives, evaluate their continuing effectiveness in guiding development, and either move forward, add new goals or objectives, or a combination of the two to guide the next development priorities and initiatives for the next term.

### 2.3 COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on life in general, but stunning historical impacts on aviation in particular. Florida was no exception to the disruptions in air travel experienced worldwide, yet there were some notable distinctions in the changes in activity level and economic impacts.

In Florida, a downturn in general aviation (GA) operations occurred in 2020 for most districts, except for Districts 2 and 7, due to the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Between 2019 and 2020, GA operations across the state were down by 6 percent. Since 2020, they have rebounded to reach near pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2023.

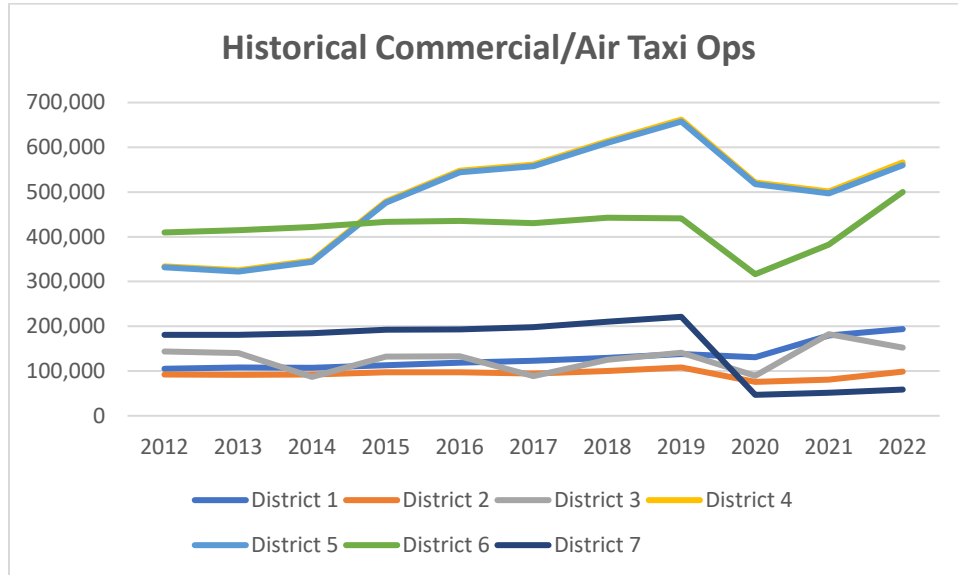
**Figure 2-1. Historical GA Operations and COVID-19 Impacts**



Source: Mead & Hunt, 2023

Also, much like general aviation operations, commercial operations witnessed a significant loss due to the impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Between 2019 and 2020, commercial operations in Florida decreased by 33 percent. By 2021, they had started to regain and by 2022 were recovered to 90 percent of their pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 2-2. Historical Commercial/Air Taxi Operations and COVID-19 Impacts



Source: Mead & Hunt, 2023

## 2.4 Summary

The history of Florida aviation demonstrates a spirit of innovation, adventure, and forward-thinking. Despite the challenges encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic, Florida’s aviation system has bounced back and is on track for exciting growth and new technologies in the years to come. By continuing to set planning as a priority, the FDOT AO demonstrates its commitment to supporting the efforts of its seven districts in serving the entire population of Florida airspace with an ever-evolving aviation industry. The remaining chapters of the FASP describe the system as of 2023 and explore the opportunities to enhance service and meet capacity demands as the system continues to grow.