

Closed for repairs: Runway getting new pavement

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BULLHEAD CITY — It's a race against time at Laughlin/Bullhead International Airport as they have a two-week window to pave the runway and parallel taxiway, both of which are being extended 1,000 feet for a total length of 8,500 feet. The airport is closed to all aircraft except helicopters until Dec. 21, said Jeremy Keating, airport director.

“We started the coordinating and planning of this about a year ago. We met with our stakeholders — the casinos and the airlines — and we had multiple meetings and we kept the carriers involved over the last six or seven months on almost biweekly calls to kind of give them an update on what was all happening to make sure we were all on the same page because a two-week closure was really critical for us,” Keating said.

“We knew that the casinos typically don't fly the charter for about a week and a half during the winter months, so we knew we had that window and then we asked for a couple of extra days on top of that, just to give us plenty of wiggle room and also to start the paving while it's somewhat warmer. Asphalt needs a certain temperature for it to properly adhere to the surface,” he said. The contractor, McCormick Construction of Bullhead City, is running two asphalt plants and two pavers to get as much done per day since they're not able to operate around the clock due to the colder night time temperatures. They've also brought in extra help, Keating said. “It's all hands on deck.”

The project is costing about \$18 million from start to finish. It's been in the making for at least 10 years, Keating said, with the required environmental assessment taking six or seven years. “It's been a long time coming,” he said.

Phase One, the design, cost \$1 million; Phase Two, involving earthwork, filling in half a wash and performing drainage work, cost \$8 million; Finally Phase Three got underway in late

October, which included redoing the electrical system on the runway, converting to LED lighting.

The final part of the phase is to lay down three inches of asphalt, for a total of \$9 million. The runway extension is less about being able to handle larger aircraft and more about allowing aircraft currently using the airport to use less fuel in taking off. The longer the runway, the less fuel will be used in the warmer weather, cutting down on charter refueling stops, Keating said.

American Airlines begins regularly scheduled passenger service at Laughlin/Bullhead International Airport on Feb. 16. For more information, go to www.flyifp.com.