SEBRING
MULTIMODAL LOGISTICS CENTER

Advanced Air Mobility: Sebring's Long View of the Future of Flight

For decades, the idea of flying cars belonged firmly in the realm of science fiction. Popularized by television shows like *The Jetsons*, the notion of personal aircraft whisking people above traffic-clogged streets seemed far-fetched.

Today, that future is beginning to take shape—and leaders at Sebring Regional Airport say they've been preparing for it for years.

"It's been the future for a long time," said Executive Director Mike Willingham. "It's just finally being realized."

Ahead of the Curve

Long before Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) entered the mainstream conversation, Sebring Regional Airport played a role in helping shape what the future of regional transportation could look like.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Sebring participated in NASA's Small Aircraft Transportation System (SATS) initiative, a groundbreaking research effort designed to reduce congestion at major airports and highways by making better use of the nation's network of community airports.

The program explored technologies and operational concepts that would allow smaller aircraft to operate safely and efficiently while connecting travelers directly to local destinations. Demonstrations held at Sebring brought together NASA, the FAA, and industry partners to test ideas that many now recognize as foundational elements of today's Advanced Air Mobility industry.

"We were very much ahead of the curve," said Deputy Director Andrew Bennett.

That spirit of innovation continues today. Sebring Regional Airport became the first airport in the nation to receive FAA approval for an Airport Layout Plan that incorporated a vertiport—a facility designed specifically to support vertical takeoff and landing aircraft operations.

The approval positions the airport to pursue future infrastructure opportunities as the industry evolves.

What Is Advanced Air Mobility?

Advanced Air Mobility refers to an emerging transportation system built around powered-lift aircraft, including electric vertical takeoff and landing vehicles, commonly known as eVTOLs.

Often described as "flying cars" or "air taxis," these aircraft combine the vertical lift capabilities of helicopters with the forward-flight efficiency of airplanes. Many designs use electric propulsion systems and are expected to operate more quietly than traditional helicopters.

Unlike conventional aircraft, eVTOLs can take off and land vertically, allowing them to operate from vertiports rather than traditional runways.

"The concept is an air taxi service," Bennett explained. "These services are very heavily focused on large metropolitan areas."

Initially, the technology is expected to connect airports, business districts, and population centers while helping passengers avoid traffic congestion.

A New Way to Connect Communities

Early applications will likely focus on urban markets, where reducing travel times can have the greatest impact. Over time, airport officials believe costs will decrease as technology advances and production scales.

"The goal is eventually to make them affordable to everyone, not just the wealthy," Willingham said.

As battery systems improve and aircraft capabilities expand, AAM could become another transportation option connecting communities throughout the country.

"It will be the Uber of the air," Willingham said.

Looking Ahead

The FAA has already begun establishing the regulatory framework necessary to integrate these new aircraft into the National Airspace System. Manufacturers around the world continue to advance designs, conduct flight testing, and move toward certification.

For Sebring Regional Airport, these developments represent more than industry headlines.

They represent the realization of ideas first explored decades ago.

"They thought we were crazy," Willingham recalled of early conversations about the technology. "They said, 'This is not real in my lifetime.'"

Today, the future envisioned through programs like SATS is steadily becoming reality.

"I think we've reached the point with the technology where it's not going away," Bennett said. "Like it or not, we are going to be dealing with vertical aircraft the rest of our lives."

For Sebring Regional Airport, the future of flight isn't simply something to watch from afar. It is a future the airport has helped envision—and one it continues to prepare for today.