

IMI - Nationwide airport development strategy

Poland's Transport Ministry has completed work on a long-term strategy for the country's airports. This plan will give the government a much more pro-active role in coordinating the development of this sector than in the past. Poland's airports are currently owned by commercial companies in which local authorities usually have controlling stakes. As such they do not need to consult the national government about their development plans. This often results in a lack of coordination in long-term regional planning between local and national authorities.

Between 2007-2013, the European Union will provide almost 350 million Euro (\$430 million) from its Cohesion Fund and 372 million Euro (\$460 million) from Regional Operational Programs for different airport projects in Poland. Together with airports' own financial resources, local government funds and bank loans, these funds will facilitate modernization of Polish airports to meet EU standards and keep up with increasing demand

Currently, the network of airports in Poland is six times smaller than in "Old" EU countries. In Poland the average number of passengers served by one airport is 3.1 million, while in the EU it is only 459,000. Poland has only one airport of category B (serving 5-10 million passengers) – Warsaw Airport. There are four airports of category C (1-5 million passengers) – Krakow, Katowice, Gdansk, and Wroclaw. The remaining eight are small category D airports.

According to Poland's Civil Aviation Office, the number of passengers served by Polish airports in 2006 was 15 million. It is expected that this number will grow to 25 million in 2010 and 35 million in 2020.

The Ministry of Transport has confirmed stated that the existing airport infrastructure cannot handle this growth and that Poland needs to build new airports. The regions targeted by the Ministry for new airport construction are Mazury (North Eastern part of Poland, near Olsztyn), Podlasie (also North-Eastern part of Poland, near Bialystok), near the city of Lublin (South-Eastern part of Poland), near the city of Kielce (200 km South of Warsaw), and near the city of Kolobrzeg (North-Western part of Poland). Additionally, the Ministry confirmed that previous plans for construction of a new airport hub with a capacity of up to 50 million passengers were abandoned due to prevailing decentralization trends within the airport industry worldwide. This situation created a need for construction of an additional airport close to Warsaw, which would support, Warsaw Okecie Airport. A former military airport in Modlin (North of Warsaw) was chosen for low-cost carriers and charter flights. It is expected that Modlin Airport will commence operation in fall 2008.

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