



Five-Alpha LLC

Be Informed • Be Aware • Be Safe

12308 Redding Drive
Fort Wayne, IN 46814
(260) 494-0891
rex@five-alpha.com

The Indianapolis Downtown Heliport *A Case Study for Retaining and Repurposing*

This is a follow-on report to the 2024 "Heliport Assessment Report"¹ commissioned by the Indianapolis Mayor's Office. A copy of that report can be downloaded from the Sunlight Coalition website at: <https://sunlightcoalition.com>



Photo by: Rex Alexander

Date: February 20, 2026

*Prepared By:
Rex J. Alexander,
President, Five-Alpha LLC*



¹ Rex J. Alexander, Indianapolis Downtown Heliport (8A4) Heliport Assessment Report (Indianapolis, IN: Five-Alpha LLC, June 6, 2024).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION	TOPIC	PAGE
I	About the Author	3
II	The Indianapolis Downtown Heliport Is a One-of-a-Kind National Asset	4
III	The Failure of the Public-Owned, Public-Operated Heliport Model Is Structural — Not Site-Specific	5
IV	Re-Establishing a Private-Operator Model for the Indianapolis Downtown Heliport as a Way Forward	8
V	Lessons from the Airport Investment Partnership Program (AIPP)	10
VI	Why a Privately Owned, Public-Use Model Is Superior for 8A4	12
VII	Flight Operational Volumes Then and Now	13
VIII	Federal Policy Now Explicitly Favors This Model: The eVTOL Integration Pilot Program (eIPP)	15
IX	Strategic Consequences of Demolition	16
X	Coexistence: It Does Not Have to be One or the Other	18
XI	Future Potential	19
XII	Conclusion	20

I. About The Author

Rex J Alexander, FRAeS

Five-Alpha LLC

President & Executive Director

Rex Alexander is the Owner, Founder, and President of Five-Alpha (5α) LLC, a U.S.-based aeronautical consultancy specializing in the demanding and highly specialized field of vertical flight infrastructure. Mr. Alexander is a veteran rotary-wing and fixed-wing pilot, airframe and powerplant technician, and aviation entrepreneur with over four decades of experience spanning military, general, and commercial aviation. His primary area of expertise encompasses helicopter, eVTOL, Advanced Air Mobility (AAM), and powered-lift infrastructure design, development, and safety, with more than 32 years of direct experience in these disciplines. Mr. Alexander is a helicopter pilot with over 40 years of aviation experience, including 20 years in the Helicopter Air Ambulance (HAA) industry and 11 years of military service—six years on active duty with the U.S. Army and five years with the Indiana Army National Guard. He is recognized by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) as a subject matter expert and, in 2026, was elected a Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society (RAeS) in recognition of his distinguished contributions to the aerospace industry. Since 2019, he has represented the Vertical Flight Society (VFS) as their infrastructure advisor to the broader aviation community. His professional and volunteer service includes serving as Chair of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 418, Standard for Heliports and Vertiports, Technical Committee; member and lead author of ASTM International F38 WK59317, New Specification for Vertiport Design; Co-Chair of the Vertical Flight Society (VFS) Safety Technology Working Group; Co-Chair of Vertical Aviation International (VAI) Vertical Flight Infrastructure (VFI) Industry Advisory Council (IAC); member of the Illuminating Engineering Society (IES) Airport and Heliport Lighting Committee; and member of the Friends and Partners in Aviation Weather (FPAW). Mr. Alexander also serves as a platform instructor for the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Transportation Safety Institute (TSI) in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, where he teaches Heliport Evaluation and Rotorcraft Accident Investigation. He is a former board member and past president of both the National EMS Pilots Association (NEMSPA) and the Indiana Association of Air Medical Services (INAAMS). Mr. Alexander holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Aeronautics from Parks College of Aviation Technology at Saint Louis University. He is a former U.S. Army Warrant Officer and “Aeroscout” helicopter pilot, instructor pilot, and standardization instructor pilot, having served on both active duty and in the Indiana Army National Guard.



Professional Data

EXPERIENCE

- 45 Yrs Aviation
- 40 Yrs Helicopter Pilot
- 32 Yrs Infrastructure Development
- 20 Yrs Helicopter Air Ambulance
- 11 Yrs Military Aviation

EDUCATION

BS Aeronautics, Parks College

TRAINING AND CERTIFICATIONS

- Commercial Helicopter Pilot
- Private Airplane Pilot
- Airframe & Powerplant Technician
- U.S. Army Warrant Officer Course
- U.S. Army Helicopter Pilot
- U.S. Army Instructor Pilot
- U.S. Army Standards Instructor
- Former IS-BAO Inspector
- TSI Safety Management Systems
- TSI Heliport Evaluation Course
- TSI Rotorcraft Accident Course

MEMBERSHIPS

- Royal Aeronautics Society
- Vertical Flight Society
- Experimental Aircraft Association
- National Fire Protection Association
- ASTM International
- Vertical Aviation International
- Illuminating Engineering Society

II. The Indianapolis Downtown Heliport Is a One-of-a-Kind National Asset

The Indianapolis Downtown Heliport (FAA Location Identifier (8A4) represents an increasingly rare category of U.S. aviation infrastructure: a centrally located, public-use heliport integrated directly into an urban core of a major metropolitan area. Of the nearly 5,705 heliports currently on record with the FAA in the United States, only 58, roughly 1%, are designated as public-use.² Of those 58 public-use heliports only nine, approximately 0.15%, are included in the FAA's National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS).³ Facilities with the location, airspace access, and operational history of 8A4 are effectively irreplaceable, and as highlighted in the 2024 Heliport Assessment Report published June 6, 2024, 8A4 meets all FAA regulatory compliance requirements.



Photo by: Rex Alexander

Once removed, this downtown heliport infrastructure cannot be realistically re-sited due to land use constraints, zoning conflicts, environmental review requirements, and political opposition. Demolition therefore represents a permanent loss of a national aviation asset and aviation capabilities, not a reversible land-use decision.

Historically, 8A4 was selected as part of the FAA's National Prototype Demonstration Heliport Program, underscoring its strategic value as a model urban vertical flight facility.⁴ That value has only increased as aviation transitions toward advanced vertical flight and distributed Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) concepts.

² Federal Aviation Administration, Airport Data Information Portal (ADIP), U.S. Department of Transportation, <https://adip.faa.gov> (accessed February 18, 2026).

³ Federal Aviation Administration, National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) https://www.faa.gov/airports/planning_capacity/npias (accessed February 18, 2026).

⁴ Indianapolis Downtown Heliport, Wikipedia, accessed February 18, 2026, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indianapolis_Downtown_Heliport

III. The Failure of the Public-Owned, Public-Operated Heliport Model Is Structural — Not Site-Specific

The operational and financial challenges cited by the Indianapolis Airport Authority as a basis for closing 8A4 are not unique to the Indianapolis Downtown Heliport; transportation research has long found that smaller aviation facilities frequently do not generate sufficient revenues to cover operating costs and often rely on subsidies or revenue enhancement strategies, and FAA-sponsored heliport planning literature explicitly treats feasibility and economic viability as recurring evaluation criteria across multiple heliport systems.⁵ They are symptomatic of a broader structural mismatch between airport-centric public authorities and heliport operations nationwide.

Public airport authorities are optimized to manage:

- Large, airline-centric revenue streams,
- Capital-intensive runway infrastructure,
- Federal entitlement and discretionary grant programs,
- Long-term bond financing.

Heliports, by contrast, depend on:

- Flexible pricing and service offerings,
- Rapid adaptation to specialized operators (EMS, charter, corporate, tour...),
- Entrepreneurial demand development,
- Low-margin, high-utilization business models.

Across the United States, publicly owned and publicly operated heliports have consistently struggled to achieve financial sustainability. This is reflected in the small and stagnant number of public-use heliports nationwide and the minimal use of Airport Improvement Program (AIP) funding for heliport development. In reviewing the FAA online records of AIP Grant Histories between 1996 and 2019, only three standalone heliports were found to have received federal funds.⁶

⁵ Federal Aviation Administration, Analyses of Heliport System Plans, DOT/FAA/PM-87/31 and DOT/FAA/PP-88/1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Transportation, February 1988).

⁶ Federal Aviation Administration, Airport Improvement Program (AIP) Grant Histories, U.S. Department of Transportation, https://www.faa.gov/airports/aip/grant_histories (accessed March 10, 2021).

Loc ID	Heliport Name	Amount
7N0	New Orleans Downtown	\$180,000.00
JRA	West 30 th Street	\$346,750.00
8A4	Indianapolis Downtown	\$2,204,134.00
	TOTAL:	\$2,730,884.00

According to this same data, there were an additional 52 airports that received federal funding in the form of AIP grant money to either construct, improve, or modify some sort of heliport infrastructure on their airport. The sum of which totaled an additional \$43,969,330.00. This equates to a total of \$46,700,214.00 in federal monies being spent on vertical flight infrastructure during this 23-year period. During this period approximately \$51,304,790,475.00 was allocated under the Airport Improvement Program. This then breaks down to approximately 0.09% of AIP funds went to vertical flight infrastructure and 0.005% went to stand alone traditional heliports with the Indianapolis Downtown Heliport being the largest recipient.

To further complicate the validity of these numbers is the fact that the FAA’s records are somewhat vague as to what exactly these funds were applied. Only 11 out of the 52 airports identified actually list a heliport on their airport master record documentation. In reviewing each of the airports via satellite imagery only half were found to have an identifiable heliport symbol, i.e., an “H”, somewhere on their property. The significance of this is that the FAA stipulates in the Heliport Design Advisory Circular that the use of the heliport standards outlined in the AC are mandatory for projects funded under Federal grant assistance programs.⁷ 8A4 is one of only a handful of heliports reviewed in this study, that having received Federal funding, has met their grant assurance obligations. Given the poor and incomplete accounting of federal funds allocated for vertical flight infrastructure at these publicly owned and operated airports, a case can be made that private entities who invest their own funds along with federal grant money would potentially provide a much higher level of accountability and oversight for the Indianapolis Downtown Heliport.

As a NPIAS facility, which has received FAA grant funds, 8A4 operates within a framework of federal grant-assurance expectations which are inherently designed for larger airports and can be disproportionately constraining for small, low-margin airports and heliports. In practice, pricing flexibility, leasing practices, and access policies must be administered in ways that protect nondiscrimination principles and federal investment, even when the facility’s revenue base is limited and demand is highly sensitive to

⁷ Federal Aviation Administration, Advisory Circular 150/5390-2D: Heliport Design (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Transportation, January 5, 2023).

responsiveness and operating availability. This helps explain why public sponsors often struggle to operate heliports as commercially responsive enterprises without a heliport-specialized operator model. In this context, closure can appear to be the simplest risk and cost-control option even when strategic value and future utility remain.

When comparing the business model of an airport to that of a heliport there are significant differences between the two that must be accounted for if one expects to succeed in operating a financially viable heliport.⁸ It has been proven time and again that attempting to operate a heliport using the traditional airport model will likely result in failure. The Indianapolis Heliport enjoyed significant success in its early days when those who made the decisions were helicopter-centric professionals. The issue is not demand for vertical flight services, but the inability of airport-centric public authorities to operate heliports in a commercially responsive manner.

However, once the Indianapolis Airport Authority took over the day-to-day operations and management of the heliport, the heliport began to slip into decline and disrepair. In recent years, under the management of the Indianapolis Airport Authority, access has often been restricted even during normal business hours due to inadequate staffing of the facility. This resulted in limited access for operators seeking to land at the heliport to venture into the city since the facility was closed and locked down after hours. This restricted access discouraged the routine helicopter traffic the heliport previously enjoyed, thereby contributing to its declining operational numbers. For heliports, utilization is unusually sensitive to access reliability and operating availability, so restrictions can suppress demand enough to make the facility appear structurally unviable.

While there is a considerable amount of public advertising associated and attributed to the Indianapolis Downtown Heliport in the media, over the years those advertisements illustrating the positive qualities of the facility have become few and far between in recent years. Little to no advertising could be found since the Indianapolis Airport Authority took over management of the heliport that addressed the heliport in a positive light or advertised for new tenants to set up a business at the facility. Since the publication of the 2024 Heliport Assessment Report,



Photo by: Rex Alexander

⁸ Federal Aviation Administration, Indianapolis Downtown Heliport-Operations Analysis and Marketing History, DOT/FAA/PM-87/31 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Transportation, March 1990).

there is little to no public evidence in the media that IAA invested additional capital for the upkeep or preservation of the heliport beyond the minimum required to meet Federal obligations. Nor could evidence be found that showed an effort to seek out new tenants or encourage current tenants to maintain residency.

The Indianapolis Heliport did not decline because of poor location, flawed design, or insufficient market demand. Rather, it declined due to a lack of sustained vision and leadership from individuals deeply invested in the vertical flight industry. The long-term decline in demand, dwindling tenants, and low revenue of the Indianapolis Heliport is not the fault of the heliport or the helicopter community, it's what happens when well-meaning airport-minded individuals attempt to run a heliport like an airport.

IV. Re-Establishing a Private-Operator Model for the Indianapolis Downtown Heliport as a Way Forward

The historical record of the Indianapolis Downtown Heliport (8A4) demonstrates that its period of greatest operational relevance, utilization, and civic value coincided with a privately operated business model. The Indianapolis Downtown Heliport – Operations Analysis and Marketing History study makes clear that the heliport's early success was not accidental, nor was it driven solely by location or infrastructure. Rather, it was the result of deliberate entrepreneurial management by the Indianapolis Heliport Corporation (IHC), operating under lease from the Indianapolis Airport Authority (IAA), with full responsibility for day-to-day operations, marketing, and business development.

From its opening in January 1985 through the late 1980s, the heliport consistently supported approximately 10,000–12,000 operations per year, with demand remaining largely stable year over year, aside from the pronounced spike associated with the Indianapolis 500 in the month of May every year. During this period, the heliport functioned as a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week facility, offering maintenance, fuel, office space, and diversified non-aviation revenue streams within the terminal building. This structure allowed the heliport to operate as a true business enterprise rather than a narrowly defined transportation utility.



Photo by: Rex Alexander

Critically, the FAA study directly attributes much of the heliport’s success to private managerial control, noting that the IHC enjoyed greater flexibility in marketing, pricing, community engagement, and service diversification than a public agency typically can sustain. The IHC treated the heliport as both an aviation facility and a civic asset—actively engaging with the Chamber of Commerce, participating in community outreach, enforcing noise-sensitive operational practices, and cultivating political goodwill. The concept of the “invisible heliport,” emphasized in the FAA report, reflects this philosophy: a facility that blends into the urban fabric operationally, socially, and economically rather than standing apart as a bureaucratic appendage. Notably, all mandatory federal grant assurance obligations associated with AIP funding were fully satisfied during this period under private operational management.

When operational control transitioned away from this private-operator model and was absorbed more directly into the Indianapolis Airport Authority’s public-sector framework, many of these entrepreneurial characteristics eroded. The marketing intensity, business diversification, and community-oriented identity that defined the heliport originally, as documented in the FAA report, were lost. The heliport increasingly came to rely on passive revenue sources—primarily landing fees and fuel sales—rather than the multi-tenant, multi-service approach that had previously underwritten its financial resilience.

With respect to heliports, private ownership and operations are inherently better positioned to respond to the specialized helicopter and vertical flight market. Unlike commercial service airports, heliports rely on niche demand, relationship-driven business, and flexible service offerings. A private operator can adjust hours, staffing, pricing, and services in near-real time based on customer behavior. By contrast, a public airport authority—structured to manage large, federally regulated airports—tends to apply standardized policies, risk-averse budgeting, and slow procurement cycles that are ill-suited to a heliport’s operating environment. In their study, the FAA explicitly recognized this mismatch, observing that private operation likely enabled marketing and business practices that would have been difficult for a public agency to replicate.

Re-establishing the heliport under a private-operator model does not require divestment of public interest. Today nearly half of the public-use heliports on record with the FAA, are in fact privately owned, lending credibility to support this model.⁹ Historically this private operation structure has proven effective and aligns with longstanding FAA policy allowing such arrangements. It also insulates taxpayers from operational risk while incentivizing the operator to maximize utilization, diversify revenue, and reintegrate the heliport into the city’s economic development strategy.

⁹ Federal Aviation Administration, Airport Data Information Portal (ADIP), U.S. Department of Transportation, <https://adip.faa.gov> (accessed February 18, 2026).

V. Lessons from the Airport Investment Partnership Program (AIPP)

Congress has repeatedly attempted to introduce private capital and operational discipline into U.S. aviation infrastructure through the Airport Privatization Pilot Program (1996).¹⁰ While the U.S. DOT identified Airport Privatization in their Strategic Plan for FY 2018-2022, published February 2018, as a potential path forward for airport sponsors to explore privatization as a means of generating access to private capital for airport improvement, the program has produced limited measurable success.¹¹

Under this program, the FAA was authorized to permit up to 10 public airport sponsors to sell or lease an airport with certain restrictions and to exempt the sponsor and the private operator from certain Federal requirements that could otherwise make privatization impractical. As in the case of the Indianapolis Heliport, privatization as a means to both keep and foster aviation infrastructure in the U.S. was never considered.



Photo by: Rex Alexander

Despite statutory expansions in 2012 and 2018 removing participation limits and broadening eligibility, the program has seen extremely limited success:

- Only 12 airports have applied since inception.
- Only two airports have completed the full privatization process.
- No heliports have ever been considered.

This outcome is often misinterpreted as evidence that privatization “does not work” in U.S. aviation. In reality, AIPP failed because large commercial airports are structurally incompatible with privatization under current federal, political, and financial constraints.

¹⁰ Federal Aviation Reauthorization Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-264, § 149 (1996) (establishing the Airport Privatization Pilot Program).

¹¹ U.S. Department of Transportation, Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2018–2022 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Transportation, February 2018)

<https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/docs/mission/administrations/office-policy/304866/dot-strategic-plan-fy2018-2022.pdf>

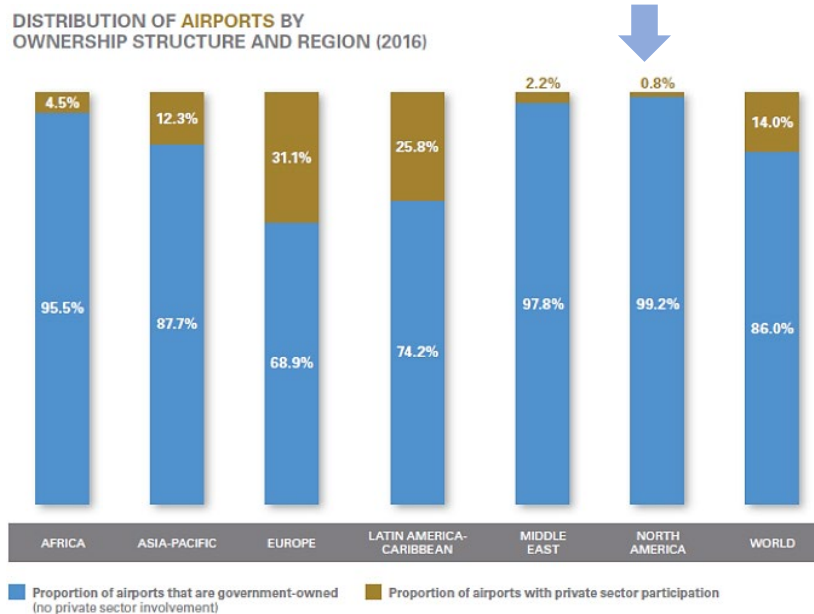
Major airports face conflicting stakeholder objectives (airlines, labor, bondholders, municipalities), federal grant assurance lock-in, and political risk associated with revenue-critical public assets.

Heliports on the other hand do not share these same constraints and could ultimately thrive in a public/private privatization partnership such as the one originally suggested under the AIPP. Importantly, the failure of AIPP does not invalidate privatization as a concept; it demonstrates that scale-appropriate infrastructure must be matched with appropriate governance models.



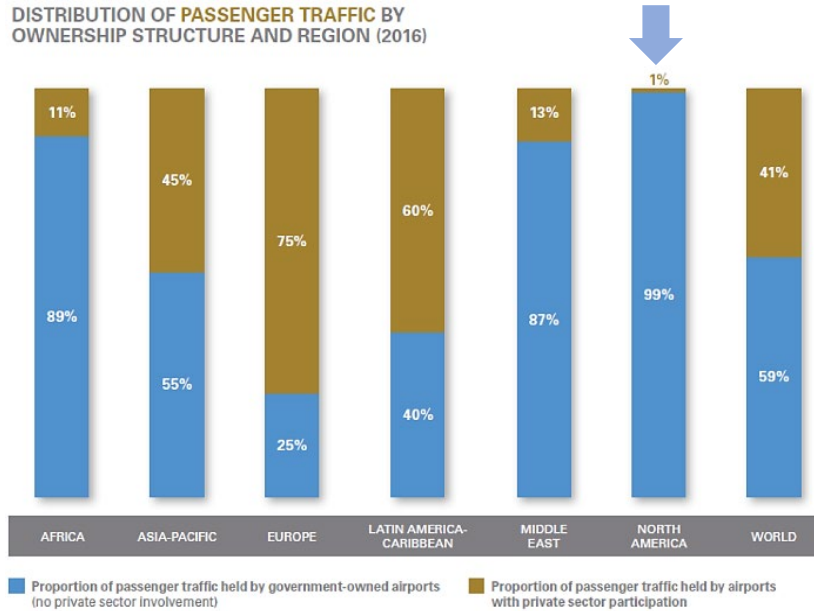
Photo by: Rex Alexander

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has acknowledged the limited global penetration of public-private partnership models in referencing airport economics figures and analyses extracted from the Airports Council International Policy Brief published in April 2017. In their report, ICAO stated that: *“Government-owned operators or airports that are exclusively managed by public authorities continue to make up the lion’s share of airports across the globe, irrespective of the growing interest in private sector financing and management of the airports.”* In 2016 only 0.8% of the airports in North America showed private sector participation and only 1.0% of passenger traffic held by airports involved private sector participation.¹²



¹² International Civil Aviation Organization, “Public-Private Partnership (PPP),” Economic Development of Air Transport, accessed February 21, 2026, <https://www2023.icao.int/sustainability/Pages/im-ppp.aspx>

DISTRIBUTION OF PASSENGER TRAFFIC BY OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE AND REGION (2016)



Provided a new flexible management and operations structure can be properly instituted for the Indianapolis Heliport, it is well within the realm of possibilities that funds generated by the Heliport could flow back to the IAA and the network of airports that they oversee which could in turn provide support for a vertical flight network throughout the Indianapolis area and beyond.

VI. Why a Privately Owned, Public-Use Model Is Superior for 8A4

Privately owned, public-use aviation facilities already represent the majority of U.S. airports.¹³ This model allows retention of public access and regulatory oversight while at the same time transferring of operational and financial risk to private entities, allowing for market-driven service development and utilization growth.

For heliports in particular, private ownership enables flexible tenant arrangements, integration with Part 91 and Part 135 tour, EMS, corporate, and experimental operations, and rapid adaptation to new aircraft types and operational concepts. A cooperative public-private structure would allow Indianapolis to preserve 8A4 as a public-use aviation asset while eliminating the structural inefficiencies inherent in public-sector operation that all public-use heliports that are also publicly owned have suffered from for several decades.

¹³ Federal Aviation Administration, Airport Data Information Portal (ADIP), U.S. Department of Transportation, <https://adip.faa.gov> (accessed February 18, 2026).

The Indianapolis Airport Authority (IAA) has cited a sharp decline in operations and financial losses:¹⁴¹⁵

- The heliport saw about half the operations in 2019 versus a decade earlier.
- Over the last decade, usage dropped from ~3,400 operations annually to under ~1,700.
- IAA reported operating costs of ~\$735,470 in 2022 with significant capital expenditures approaching \$4 million since 2012.

Such performance underlines a recurring challenge for public agencies: public assets often can't adapt quickly to market demand or innovate business models because they are bound by bureaucratic processes and constrained revenue sources.

VII. Flight Operational Volumes Then and Now

As reported by the FAA in the Indianapolis Heliport analysis study, operational flight volumes in the mid-to-late 1980s, under a private-operator model, equated to conservative estimates of 10,000–12,000 operations per year. Given the limited publicly available data regarding flight volumes prior to closure, reliance on independent tracking sources is necessary. One such source is the United States Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) system.

For clarity, the FAA defines ADS-B as follows:

Automatic Dependent Surveillance–Broadcast (ADS–B) is an advanced surveillance technology that combines an aircraft’s positioning source, aircraft avionics, and a ground infrastructure to create an accurate surveillance interface between aircraft and ATC. ADS–B is a performance–based surveillance technology that is more precise than radar and consists of two different services: ADS–B Out and ADS–B In. ADS-B Out works by broadcasting information about an aircraft’s GPS location, altitude, ground speed and other data to ground stations and other aircraft, once per second.

¹⁴ Shuey, Mickey. “Could Downtown Heliport Play a Role in Attracting Aviation Innovation?” Indianapolis Business Journal, April 7, 2023.

¹⁵ Shuey, Mickey. “Indianapolis Airport Authority moving ahead with decommissioning downtown heliport” Indianapolis Business Journal, May 31, 2024.

While the FAA’s ADS-B mandate did not take place until January 1, 2020, a significant amount of data was still available. This data shows that when helicopter business entities reengage in operations at the heliport, if only on the periphery, heliport flight volumes showed a noticeable improvement, albeit not to the extent experienced during private management.¹⁶

FLIGHTAWARE 8A4 DEPARTURE COUNT BY YEAR 2018-2024		
RANKED	YEAR	COUNT
1	2023	3114
2	2022	3069
3	2024	450
4	2021	114
5	2020	85
6	2019	61
7	2018	37

FLIGHTAWARE 8A4 ARRIVAL COUNT BY YEAR 2018-2024		
RANKED	YEAR	COUNT
1	2023	2987
2	2022	2968
3	2024	434
4	2021	113
5	2020	85
6	2019	61
7	2018	37

It must be noted that during this period not all aircraft operating in ADS-B rule airspace were ADS-B Out equipped (authorizations to operate without ADS-B Out existed after Jan. 1, 2020), and ADS-B surveillance reception from FAA ground sites is line-of-sight; low-altitude operations and antenna shielding can reduce range or result in loss of contact. FAA-published ADS-B surveillance coverage products also depict coverage by altitude (including 3,000 feet AGL), reflecting that lower-altitude coverage can be less complete. Even with incomplete surveillance capture, the observed activity levels indicate

¹⁶ Rex J. Alexander, Indianapolis Downtown Heliport (8A4) Heliport Assessment Report (Indianapolis, IN: Five-Alpha LLC, June 6, 2024).

material latent demand when the facility is accessible and operationally usable, which is relevant to any closure decision framed as “insufficient use.”^{17 18 19}

As for the helicopter market in general, based on the following market research, we can expect the helicopter industry in the United States to grow.

- Market Data Forecast (MDF) show that the North America helicopter market was valued at USD 21.00 billion in 2024, reached USD 21.63 billion in 2025, and is projected to grow to USD 27.43 billion by 2033, registering a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 3.01% during the forecast period from 2025 to 2033.²⁰
- The IMARC Group reported that the US helicopter services market size reached USD 666.39 Million in 2024 and, looking forward, expect the market to reach USD 852.92 Million by 2033, exhibiting a growth rate (CAGR) of 2.78% during 2025-2033.²¹

VIII. Federal Policy Now Explicitly Favors This Model: The eVTOL Integration Pilot Program (eIPP)

In June 2025, President Donald J. Trump signed an executive order establishing the eVTOL Integration Pilot Program (eIPP) as part of a broader federal initiative to accelerate the deployment of drones and electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft in the United States.²²

¹⁷ Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Aeronautical Information Manual (AIM), Section 4-1-20, Automatic Dependent Surveillance–Broadcast (ADS-B) Services. Washington, DC: FAA, current edition. Available at: https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/atpubs/aim_html/chap4_section_1.html

¹⁸ Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). ADS-B Surveillance Coverage Map and Research. Washington, DC: FAA Air Traffic Organization. Available at: https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/technology/equipadsb/research/airspace

¹⁹ Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). FAA Issues Policy on ADS-B Compliance, News Release, December 2019. Washington, DC. Available at: <https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/faa-issues-policy-ads-b-compliance>

²⁰ Market Data Forecast. North America Helicopter Market Size, Share, Trends & Growth Forecast Report from 2025 to 2033. MarketDataForecast.com. Accessed February 2026. Available at: <https://www.marketdataforecast.com/market-reports/north-america-helicopter-market>

²¹ IMARC Group. US Helicopter Services Market Size, Share & Forecast 2033. IMARCGroup.com. Accessed February 2026. Available at: <https://www.imarcgroup.com/us-helicopter-services-market>

²² The White House. Executive Order — Unleashing American Drone Dominance, Executive Order, June 6, 2025. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/06/unleashing-american-drone-dominance>

The executive order directs the U.S. Department of Transportation and the FAA to:

- Solicit proposals from state and local governments partnered with private industry;
- Execute pilot projects demonstrating real-world eVTOL operations;
- Use operational data to inform permanent regulatory frameworks for advanced air mobility.

Critically, the eIPP is structured around public-private cooperation, not federal ownership or centralized public operation. Participation requires local infrastructure that is:

- Already compatible with vertical flight,
- Capable of near-term operational deployment,
- Managed in a way that supports innovation, flexibility, and private investment.

To that end, the Indianapolis Downtown Heliport, more so than most other heliports in the United States, aligns precisely with the federal objectives outlined in the executive order. Demolishing 8A4 would remove one of the very few downtown aviation sites in the U.S. capable of supporting eIPP participation and would place Indianapolis at a strategic disadvantage relative to peer cities.

IX. Strategic Consequences of Demolition

Thinking of the heliport as just aviation infrastructure is a highly myopic approach when considering all of the possibilities. In evaluating the potential impact that the heliport could have one need only take an inventory of what venues exist that could take advantage of this site that historically have not. Venues such as the Indianapolis Colts football stadium, the Indiana Pacers basketball arena, and a future national soccer stadium which would not have to compete for space. These assets could easily complement one another in the long term if planned and managed properly.

Beyond the traditional land use argument of why the city is looking to sell the Indianapolis Heliport to make room for a potential soccer stadium, eliminating 8A4 would have far-reaching effects on the city's capabilities to respond to natural disasters and support its citizens.

Based on published FAA heliport size and weight criteria, most hospital heliports in the region do not appear capable of supporting the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter.^{23 24} This is important due to the fact that this helicopter is frequently deployed during domestic disaster relief efforts in the U.S. by Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard units. This includes the Indiana Army National Guard UH-60 MEDEVAC helicopters operated by the 38th Combat Aviation Brigade located approximately 20 nautical miles to the southwest in Shelbyville, Indiana.²⁵



Source: Indiana Army National Guard 38th CAB

In recent years many states have had to rely on these government assets during times of disaster and crises to provide emergency evacuation and care for their populations. The Indianapolis heliport is the only heliport within the Indianapolis Metro area capable of accommodating these types of aviation assets. Consequently, none of the hospital heliports within the Indianapolis metropolitan area are designed or capable of supporting the new U.S. Presidential helicopter the Sikorsky VH-92.²⁶

The only centrally located heliport facility capable of supporting these larger helicopters is the Indianapolis Downtown Heliport, which is strategically located in close proximity to all three Level-One trauma centers in the downtown area. Once lost, this critical capability cannot be replicated.



Source: Wikipedia

²³ Federal Aviation Administration, Advisory Circular 150/5390-2D: Heliport Design (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Transportation, January 5, 2023).

²⁴ Federal Aviation Administration, Airport Data Information Portal (ADIP), U.S. Department of Transportation, <https://adip.faa.gov> (accessed February 18, 2026).

²⁵ Indiana National Guard. 38th Combat Aviation Brigade. Indiana Army National Guard official website. Accessed February 2026. Available at: <https://www.in.gov/indiana-national-guard/indiana-army-national-guard/38th-infantry-division/38th-combat-aviation-brigade>

²⁶ DEFENCE ReDEFiNED. Sikorsky New VH-92A Presidential Helicopters for the US Marine Corps. August 24, 2024. Available at: <https://defenceredefined.com.cy/sikorsky-%CE%BDew-vh-92a-presidential-helicopters-for-the-us-marine-corps>. Accessed February 21, 2026.

X. Coexistence: It Does Not Have to be One or the Other

By their very nature, heliports have demonstrated that they provided access to hard-to-reach location. The same holds true in the case of the Indianapolis Heliport. There should be no reason, given the proper master planning is accomplished early on, that the Indianapolis heliport cannot coexist with other venues within the city's landscape.

Providing public access to inner-city venues that host large sporting events, concerts, and conferences such as those routinely held in Indianapolis has always been a challenge for city transportation planners. While its overall form and function may need to change, integrating the heliport into different city landscapes is achievable. This evolution in transportation accessibility is one of the cornerstone of what Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) seeks to address.

Something of particular significance which will allow this evolution in transportation to take place at this location when compared to others in the United States is the protection the Indianapolis Heliport's airspace has been afforded. Many heliports, particularly private-use heliports, have little to no protection provided to them by the FAA where their airspace is concerned.²⁷

Recognizing this issue early on city leaders went out of their way to ensure that the Indianapolis heliport's airspace would be fully protected through the development of some of the most comprehensive ordinances for heliports in the U.S. If the heliport were in fact closed, recreating this type and quality of protection at another location today would be exceedingly challenging.

Regardless of the fact that privatization of the heliport may be an excellent option for ensuring these critical services remain available in the future, the most important part of this effort is the survival of the heliport. Without the heliport business models become a moot point.

²⁷ City-County Council of Indianapolis and Marion County, Indiana, City-County General Ordinance No. 81, 1981; Airspace District Zoning Ordinance of Marion County, Indiana (Docket No. 81-AO-5), adopted September 9, 1981.

XI. Future Potential

There is a significant amount of untapped potential that has yet to be realized at the Indianapolis Heliport facility. With the rapid emergence of Advanced Air Mobility in the very near future this facility is better positioned than almost every other vertical flight infrastructure facility in the U.S. to take full advantage of the next generation of aviation transportation. This is due primarily to its site location being in such close proximity to numerous downtown destinations in conjunction with its large, underdeveloped footprint.²⁸

Opportunities abound when one considers the potential of a co-located Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) program at this location for inner-city and underprivileged youth.²⁹ Given the rich history in aviation education and research within the state of Indiana through institutions such as Indiana University, Purdue University, and Vincennes University, to name a few, the potential to orchestrate a multi-tiered education and research facility that includes the Indianapolis Heliport and Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) fostered by the current administration's executive order establishing the eVTOL Integration Pilot Program is quite exciting.^{30 31 32}



Photo by: Rex Alexander

²⁸ Mendonca, Nancy, James R. Murphy, Michael D. Patterson, Rex Alexander, Gabriela Juárez, and Clint Harper. Advanced Air Mobility Vertiport Considerations: A List and Overview. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Presented at the AIAA Aviation Forum, June 2022.

²⁹ Federal Aviation Administration. FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018, Aviation Workforce Development Grant Programs, Pub. L. 115-254 (2018).

³⁰ Purdue University. School of Aviation and Transportation Technology. <https://polytechnic.purdue.edu/schools/aviation-and-transportation-technology>

³¹ Indiana University. Research at Indiana University. <https://research.iu.edu>

³² Vincennes University. Aviation Technology Center. <https://www.vinu.edu>

XII. Conclusion

The Indianapolis Downtown Heliport should not be demolished. Its challenges are not a failure of location or relevance, but a misalignment of governance model.

Federal experience with the AIPP demonstrates that one-size-fits-all public ownership does not work for all aviation infrastructure. Recent federal policy — culminating in the eIPP executive order — now explicitly favors public-private cooperation, private operational leadership, and infrastructure readiness for advanced vertical flight.

Keeping the Indianapolis Downtown Heliport operational — but transitioning its business model — makes sense because:

1. It is one of the very few public-use heliports in the United States with a rare central urban location.
2. The current public-sector, airport authority model has proven unable to sustain financial and operational viability, a problem reflected across U.S. public aviation infrastructure.
3. A privately owned, public-use model, ideally under a cooperative public-private system, would be more adaptable, financially resilient, and innovative, aligning with global trends toward private sector involvement.
4. Retaining and reimagining 8A4 supports emerging aviation trends such as eVTOL and Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) while enhancing Indianapolis's economic competitiveness.

In short, turning over management to private operators with strong vertical flight aviation experience — under public use obligations — stands to maximize community benefit while solving the economic challenges that led the current model toward closure.

INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK