



## Preparing for the Big Game in 2018 with the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Airports Commission

### The Problem

When Minneapolis won the bid to host the Big Game in 2018 (also known as Super Bowl 52), local infrastructure managers recognized that increased air traffic would present a challenge. Although the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport is one of the largest and busiest in the country, it does not have the capacity to accommodate the influx of spectators and corporate sponsors that the Super Bowl draws.

To help alleviate demand, the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Airports Commission turned to two general aviation airports—Anoka County-Blaine and Flying Cloud—to serve as key reliever airports for the event.

Gary Schmidt, the director of the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Airports Commission, played an integral role in preparing for Super Bowl 52. After sitting down with NFL representatives over a year ago, Mr. Schmidt realized that to prepare for the variety



Private jets on the Flying Cloud Airport runway during the Ryder Cup, 2016. Courtesy of Gary Schmidt, Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Airports Commission.

of factors that could affect the event, his airports would need to develop comprehensive and well-defined management plans.

### Synthesis 57 Comes Into Play

Mr. Schmidt served as a topic panel member for *ACRP Synthesis Report 57: Airport Response to Special Events*, and he recognized that the Super Bowl would present challenges fundamentally different from past events held in the area, such as the Ryder Cup. He referred to Synthesis 57 several times throughout the planning process to make sure he accounted for every detail

when creating the Super Bowl 52 management plans.

The report, originally published in 2014, addresses special event planning by outlining basic organizing principles, identifying past surprises, and presenting lessons learned from other airports. Using case studies from a variety of event types, the report concludes that one-off and first-time events require the most planning and organization; bad weather, accidents, and security breaches are organizers' most feared "unknowns"; and aircraft reservation systems and ramp

*continued on page 2*

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**-Gary Schmidt**

control managers are the two most effective ways to manage parking and ground control.

The report also provides a six-step framework approach to event planning that allows airports to stay flexible and account for contingencies. The framework includes three comprehensive yet customizable checklists with step-by-step details, which airport managers can use to ensure that their operational plans cover the most likely scenarios to arise and anticipate surprises that may occur.

## **Creating the Management Plans**

The Anoka County-Blaine and Flying Cloud Airports are both

about 15 miles in different directions from the U.S. Bank Stadium, where the Super Bowl was held, and they had never experienced the expected volume of Super Bowl air traffic. Mr. Schmidt sat down with his team, and they “went through the [check] lists and asked: does this apply?”

Two pressing concerns for Mr. Schmidt and the Commission were managing private jets and preparing for inclement weather. With corporate sponsors playing an increasingly prominent role in NFL franchises, more than 1,500 corporate jets were expected to descend into the Twin Cities. Average February temperatures in the region rarely climb above freezing, and de-icing planes and runways is essential to ensure safe conditions for takeoffs and arrivals. The Commission also had to account for related issues of

security, and regional air traffic coordination.

In addition, Mr. Schmidt identified other issues from the checklist such as airfield signage, ground transportation wayfinding, and limo and VIP marshalling.

By using both the Commission’s expertise in preparing for special events and the Synthesis 57 checklists, Mr. Schmidt and his team created a comprehensive management plan that addresses all their concerns. Some highlights of their plan include:

- Lighting bars to ensure that every jet was illuminated.
- A private security firm to protect over \$1 billion worth of equipment parked in the airfield.
- Designated wayfinding and signage for limos to pick up VIPs near their aircrafts.
- Regional coordination for airspace flow rates and departure routes.
- Permits to use and dispose of glycol for de-icing.

By using Synthesis 57’s checklists as a guide, Mr. Schmidt implemented his plan with “reassurance and confidence” for Super Bowl 52.

Ground view of jets parked on the Premier Jet Center ramp at Flying Cloud Airport. Courtesy of Gary Schmidt, Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Airports Commission.

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