



The Metropolitan Knoxville Airport Authority invites applications for
Chief Operating Officer

McGhee Tyson Airport (TYS)
Downtown Island Airport (DKX)
Knoxville, TN

EXECUTIVE SEARCH SERVICES PROVIDED BY ADK CONSULTING & EXECUTIVE SEARCH



Metropolitan Knoxville Airport Authority

In 1937, the City of Knoxville opened a municipal airport to support the growing number of aviation enthusiasts in the region as well as to capitalize on the city's favorable location in the establishment of an air mail route. Being centrally located within one day's drive or a few hours' flight from major cities, Knoxville made its position in the air transportation system critical. As the demand for air travel grew, the city transitioned airport operations to a newly created, independent, nonprofit agency that would own and operate the city's aviation system. In 1978, the Metropolitan Knoxville Airport Authority (MCAA) was established. It is governed by a nine-member Board of Commissioners who are appointed by the Mayor of Knoxville and confirmed by Knoxville City Council, and are charged with the financial success, future planning and development, and operation of both McGhee Tyson Airport (TYS) and Downtown Island Airport (DKX).

The MCAA directly employs over 195 staff members to operate TYS and DKX. There are approximately 3,700 additional employees with the various airlines and agencies, and an estimated 15,500 people are employed regionally because of TYS. Within MCAA's organizational structure, the Chief Operating Officer reports to the President and CEO to lead the multifunctional operations needs of the airports to ensure organizational goals are met.

The Airports

McGhee Tyson Airport

Located 12 miles from the heart of Downtown Knoxville, 20 miles from a world-class technological research hub at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory and 30 miles from the majestic landscape of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, McGhee Tyson Airport (TYS) is at the center of East Tennessee's growing region. Out of the top 100 major U.S. airports, TYS is the fastest-growing airport by passenger percentage increase for calendar year 2024, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation. This trend in passenger statistics can be attributed to strong relationships and operational leadership with air carriers: Allegiant Air, American Airlines, Avelo, Delta Air Lines, Frontier Airlines, Southwest Airlines, and United Airlines. Combined, these airlines operate more than 130 daily nonstop flights to 34 destinations, giving TYS passengers more nonstop options than most other peer airports. Moreover, the market for TYS is found in Knoxville's Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) of nearly 1.1 million people; however, airport research indicates that TYS attracts passengers from a much larger MSA of nearly 3.2 million people.

In addition to commercial air service, the airport's two parallel runways support significant general aviation, air cargo and military operations. At 9,000' and 10,000' in length, the TYS dual runway system annually handles over 90 million pounds of cargo; over 110,000 operations; and is home to a world-class fixed-base operator, Signature Flight Support. TYS is also the host facility for the Tennessee Air National Guard's 134th Air Refueling Wing and their KC-135 Stratotankers as well as the Tennessee Army National Guard's Aviation Support Facility and their UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters.

TYS provides visitors with an on-site, full-service Hilton Hotel connected to the airline terminal that completed a significant renovation in 2016. In 2020, the hotel opened an expanded conference meeting space, making it one of the largest meeting spaces available in the area.

Economically, TYS has an economic impact of \$2.4 billion annually, and DKX has an economic impact of \$22 million annually in the local economies of its five surrounding counties through job creation, recruitment of new businesses, the attraction of new air service and the infusion of tourism dollars into each community. For example, based upon the recruitment package developed through relationships in the community and with state and federal organizations, the airport successfully recruited Cirrus Aircraft's Delivery and Training Center for all worldwide Cirrus Aircraft deliveries as well as their large Cirrus Factory Service Center. Joining Cirrus in the airport's 50-acre development park, known as the West Aviation Area, is a regional jet maintenance facility operated by Endeavor.





The Airports (*continued*)

With an annual operating budget of approximately \$46 million (Fiscal Year 2026), TYS is growing its facilities to meet the growing demand for air travel in its community. In 2021, the airport completed construction on the largest project in its 80-year history, the Airfield Modernization Program. This \$130 million, 6-year capital improvement project is a comprehensive airfield project that includes installation of a CAT I ILS and airfield lighting improvements on Runway 23L and a complete reconstruction and elevation change of RWY 5L/23R. It required complete demolition of existing airfield pavement, significant grade change and earthwork, concrete pavement, LED upgraded airfield electrical lighting system, LED airfield signage, CAT II ILS, Approach Lighting System, and markings. MCAA recently rolled out “Flight Plan,” a decade-long growth and development plan to elevate McGhee Tyson Airport’s footprint by adding gates, concessions, and renovating restrooms, the security checkpoint and replacing escalators, all in an effort to improve the passenger experience and attract more air service to East Tennessee. As part of Flight Plan in 2024, TYS broke ground on a \$186 million parking expansion which will add 3,500 parking spaces upon its anticipated completion in 2027. The garage’s six-story design draws inspiration from East Tennessee and will be a prominent feature at the airport.

Downtown Island Airport

Downtown Island Airport (DKX) is Knoxville’s most successful general aviation airport. Located adjacent to Downtown Knoxville and the University of Tennessee, DKX handles more than 80,000 operations per year on average and has over 180 aircraft based on the island. In 2023, DKX completed a new runway, lighting and signage project to better accommodate general aviation traffic. In 2024, updates were begun on the DKX terminal building and entrance.

The Community

Founded in 1791, where the French Broad and Holston Rivers converge to form the Tennessee River, Knoxville has always been known for its great beauty, but this is a city where more than rivers converge. In this vibrant, progressive city, art meets adventure... and culture meets cuisine... and no one meets a stranger.

Art Meets Adventure

Knoxville is one of America's most vibrant cities for live music. From classical to bluegrass, country to rock, live music is on the Square, on the streets and on the stages of the historic Bijou and Tennessee Theatres, hosting concerts and Broadway shows as well as performances by the Knoxville Opera Company, the Knoxville Jazz Orchestra and the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra. Year-round, this diverse and welcoming city hosts more than 70 cultural festivals and events. Highlights include the Dogwood Arts Festival, Rhythm N' Blooms Music Festival, Women in Jazz Jam, Knox Asian Fest, the Rossini Festival, Film Fest Knox, and the Big Ears Festival.

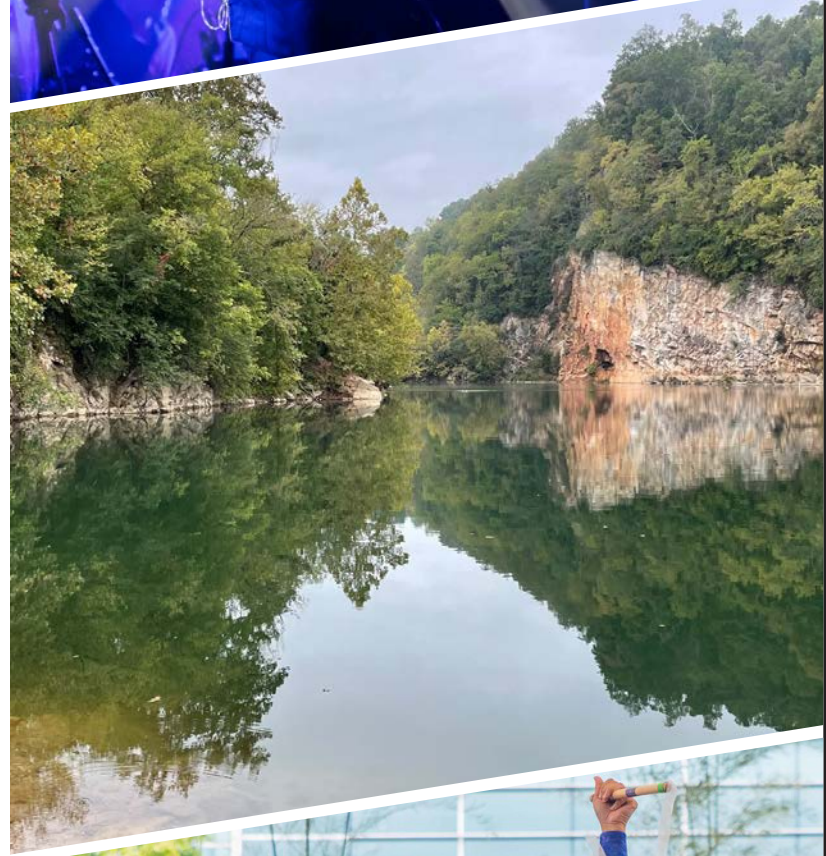
The sounds of nature are also part of Knoxville's soundtrack. Located just three miles from downtown, Knoxville's Urban Wilderness is a spectacular 1,000-acre outdoor adventure area where you can hike, bike, climb, paddle or just wander in the woods – within the heart of the city. Over 50 miles of trails and greenways connect a nature center, pristine lakes, historic sites, quarries, adventure playgrounds, city parks and a 500-acre wildlife area. The city also features more than 85 miles of greenway connecting all facets of the city.

Culture Meets Cuisine

Knoxville is home to award-winning museums and attractions that educate, entertain and inspire.

The Knoxville Museum of Art celebrates the art and artists of East Tennessee. The KMA presents an engaging schedule of exhibitions and is home to Richard Jolley's Cycle of Life, one of the largest figurative glass-and-steel assemblages in the world. To supplement the arts in our community, TYS has its own art exhibition space that features the artistic talents of the region.

Other popular Knoxville attractions include the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame, an international museum dedicated to preserving the history of women's basketball; the East Tennessee History Center, home to exhibits that tell the history of the people, places and events that shaped this region; McClung Museum, where exhibits showcase the geological, historical, and artistic past of Tennessee and cultures from around the globe; and Zoo Knoxville, one of the premier zoological experiences in the southeast where guests come face to face with the world's most fascinating animals.





The Community *(continued)*

Knoxville has more than its fair share of culinary arts as well. With a heavy focus on locally sourced foods, Knoxville's unique culinary scene is shaped by a group of talented chefs including Tennessee's first James Beard Award winner: Joseph Lenn. Lenn is one of several Blackberry Farm chefs who operate restaurants in Knoxville.

The city is also building a name for itself as one of the best craft beer towns in the Southeast, a place to relax with some of the country's finest beers and finest people.

The pure walkability of downtown's Market Square, historic Gay Street and The Old City allows people to explore and discover vibrant murals, local music, historic sites, art galleries, shops and more than 80 restaurants (nearly all local), bars and rooftop patios.

Beyond downtown, from East to West, North to South, Knoxville offers a variety of places and activities to explore. West Knoxville features some of the area's finest shopping. East Knoxville is home to the Knoxville Botanical Garden & Arboretum and two of the city's seven historic homes. And North and South offer their fair share of parks, restaurants and gathering spots.

As mentioned, Knoxville is home to the flagship campus of the University of Tennessee, one of the nation's oldest state universities, but it's clearly more than a college town.

The state of Tennessee does not collect income tax. Combined with the area's picturesque beauty and many cultural attractions, it is easy to see how people quickly fall in love with this city.

[Click here](#) to view a short video about living in Knoxville.

With a sophisticated mix of culture and cuisine, served up with genuine hospitality, Knoxville will surprise you.

Position Overview

The Chief Operating Officer (COO) provides executive leadership for the day-to-day operations of the Metropolitan Knoxville Airport Authority (MCAA), which owns and operates McGhee Tyson Airport (TYS) and Downtown Island Airport (DKX). Reporting to the President and CEO, the COO oversees operational functions that ensure the safe, efficient, and compliant operation of both airports.

This role provides strategic and operational direction for Facilities, Operations, Public Safety, General Aviation, Technology, and Procurement. The COO ensures that airport infrastructure, systems, and services support safe aircraft operations, an excellent customer experience, and reliable service for airlines, tenants, and the traveling public.

As a key member of the executive leadership team, the COO helps guide organizational strategy, operational priorities, and long-term planning initiatives while promoting a culture of safety, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

About the Role

The COO leads complex operational functions across two airports while coordinating closely with Finance, Planning & Development, and other departments to align operational priorities with financial and capital planning goals. The position provides oversight of regulatory compliance, operational readiness, and safety programs while supporting airport growth and operational resilience.

The role also engages regularly with airport stakeholders including airlines, tenants, government partners, and the community to ensure operational continuity, regulatory compliance, and strong relationships that support the airport system's long-term success.



METROPOLITAN
KNOXVILLE
AIRPORT
AUTHORITY



Key Responsibilities

- Provide executive leadership for airport operations, facilities, public safety, technology, procurement, and general aviation
- Ensure safe and efficient operations of TYS and DKX in compliance with all FAA, state, and local regulations
- Serve as the accountable executive for the airport's Safety Management System, advancing risk management and safety culture initiatives
- Direct operational planning, maintenance programs, and infrastructure management across airfield and landside environments
- Oversee development and administration of a multimillion-dollar departmental operating budget
- Coordinate with Finance and Planning & Development departments to align operational needs with capital projects and long-term strategic priorities
- Engage internal and external stakeholders to support operational continuity, regulatory compliance, and tenant relationships

Leadership Qualities and Style

- Collaborative executive leader who works effectively across departments and disciplines
- Strategic thinker who balances operational excellence with long-term organizational priorities
- Clear communicator who can convey complex operational and regulatory matters to leadership and stakeholders
- Decisive problem-solver with strong judgment in safety, operational, and emergency management environments

For the full job description, [click here](#).

Qualifications

- Bachelor's degree in management, engineering, or a related field. Equivalent years of experience may be considered if ability to meet position requirements is demonstrated
- Nine (9) or more years of leadership experience at a Part 139-certified airport with responsibilities in operations, maintenance, or safety
- AAAE Airport Certified Employee (ACE) certification, or ability to obtain within two years. Industry executive level certification or accreditation preferred.
- Demonstrated experience managing large operational programs, budgets, and multi-functional teams
- Knowledge of aviation regulations, emergency management frameworks, and airport operational technologies

Salary and Benefits

The starting salary range for this position is \$186,465 - \$242,410. An exceptional candidate may be eligible to receive a starting salary slightly above the range with approval. MKAA offers a competitive benefit package for this position including medical/dental benefits, disability/life insurance, a 401(a)-retirement program and relocation assistance. Final salary offer will be dependent upon experience.

How To Apply

To apply online, [click here](#).

Deadline for applications: April 26, 2026

The contacts for this search are:

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The Metropolitan Knoxville Airport Authority is an equal opportunity employer.

