

IAF SYMPOSIUM ON COMMERCIAL SPACEFLIGHT SAFETY ISSUES (D6)
Enabling safe commercial spaceflight: vehicles and spaceports (3)

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ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF COMMERCIAL SPACEPORTS: LESSONS LEARNED FROM TWO
CASE STUDIES

Abstract

Despite an overcapacity of launch sites in comparison to demand, there are 11 existing commercial spaceports in the United States and at least another six under consideration. While a spaceport can bring economic growth and STEM development to a region, it requires significant and sustained investments of public funding in an uncertain and volatile market. This paper reports lessons learned from a two-case study of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Spaceport (MARS) and Spaceport America (SA), incorporating financial analysis, profit models, and studies of how the business plans and economic impacts changed over time. The MARS case study was published at ASCEND 2020 and the SA case study is scheduled to be published by Harvard Business School in March 2021. This research employs a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating policy, economic and business analysis to help policymakers, regulators and the general public understand the operations and impact of commercial spaceports that will enhance stakeholders' decision-making about proposed spaceports. Ultimately, an improved understanding of commercial spaceports will allow this network of infrastructure to support continued innovation and growth in the commercial space sector.