

**TITLE:** Request for Participation in Essential Air Service Planning and Analysis

**DISPOSITION:** Discussion and possible action

**PRESENTER/S:** Michael A. Black, AICP, City Manager

**ATTACHMENT/S:**

1. Current Alternante Essential Air Service Contract
2. Consultant Proposal

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends that the City Council review the information provided and offer direction on whether the City should participate in the consultant cost of the preparation of an Essential Air Service (EAS) market and planning analyses, and to authorize the City Manager to enter into an agreement with Grand County to ensure the funds are used as intended.

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### **Background**

Grand County operates Canyonlands Regional Airport (the “*Airport*”). While the County is solely responsible for Airport operations and financial obligations, decisions made at the Airport affect the entire region and have direct implications for Moab residents, businesses and the local economy. Because of this, the City routinely collaborates with the County on regionally significant planning and infrastructure efforts, including matters related to air service.

The Essential Air Service (“*EAS*”) program is a federal program that ensures small and rural communities retain commercial air service and connections to larger regional airports. The Airport’s current EAS carrier is Contour Airlines. Grand County is preparing to renew its EAS contract and believes a stronger, data-driven proposal will improve its competitiveness for enhanced service options, specifically direct flights to Salt Lake City (SLC) and Denver (DEN).

To meet federal timelines and prepare the most competitive EAS submission possible, the Airport Director has indicated that consultant support is necessary. The consultant scope includes market analysis and a “leakage study” identifying how many travelers choose to fly out of larger airports such as Salt Lake City (SLC) or Grand Junction (GJT) instead of Moab. This analysis is intended to clearly demonstrate Moab’s demand for air service and help attract additional or larger carriers.

The consultant cost is \$40,000, and Grand County has requested that the City share in this expense. The County has suggested a 50/50 cost split, which would require a City contribution of \$20,000.

If the City Council chooses to participate financially, the funds could be provided through either:

1. **An MOU** – a non-binding agreement documenting shared intent and how the contribution should be used; or

2. **An Interlocal Agreement (ILA)** – a binding contract outlining the purpose, use of funds, deliverables, and reporting expectations.

The appropriate mechanism depends on the level of formality and accountability the Council desires in its partnership with the County on this effort. Staff has met with County representatives, including the Airport Director, to clarify the scope and timing needs associated with the EAS renewal. The Airport Director will be attendance at the City Council meeting on Jan. 27, 2026.

Potential Motion: (if the Council chooses not to participate, no motion is necessary) I move to approve a contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to Grand County for consultant services related to the preparation of Essential Air Service market and planning analyses, and to authorize the City Manager to enter into an agreement with Grand County – whether by MOU or ILA – to ensure the funds are used as intended.

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**RELEVANT LAWS, STUDIES & PLANS:**

*Current Essential Air Service Contract*

**RESPONSIBLE DEPARTMENT(s):**

Administration

**FINANCIAL IMPACT:**

The actual impact of this request could be as much as \$20,000, which could be paid out of professional and technical services budget in City Administration.