

# GULFPORT-BILOXI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT: Essential Lifeline After Hurricane Katrina

## Catalyst for Recovery and Development

When Hurricane Katrina struck the Mississippi Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005, Gulfport-Biloxi International Airport (GPT) suffered catastrophic damage to the terminal, airfield, hangars, air cargo operations, and the ATC tower. Despite this devastation, GPT quickly became a lifeline for South Mississippi. Within just 24 hours, the airport’s runways were cleared and reopened—not yet for commercial flights, but to allow critical relief operations. The immediate reopening transformed GPT into the central hub for bringing in first responders, emergency supplies, medical aid, and fuel to devastated coastal communities. Helicopters, military aircraft, and relief flights were swiftly mobilized, providing a vital lifeline for residents and businesses cut off by flooded and impassable roads. By September 8, 2005—just ten days after landfall—GPT resumed commercial airline service. This rapid reopening not only enabled the flow of relief supplies but also allowed displaced residents, utility workers, insurance agents, business leaders and innumerable volunteers to return to the area. It helped mark the first step toward the region’s economic and social recovery.

### KATRINA’S IMMEDIATE IMPACT

- August 29, 2005: Category 3 Hurricane Katrina devastated the Mississippi Gulf Coast.
- Windows in both concourses were completely shattered causing the terminal areas under renovation to be heavily damaged by wind and rain, hangars were destroyed, airfield signage and lighting were heavily damaged, air cargo and rental car facilities were severely impacted, FAA-owned navigational aids were completely destroyed, and the ATC tower was compromised.
- 1/3 of airport team lost their homes, and all team members suffered property damage.

### AIRPORT AS A LIFELINE

- August 30, 2005: Runways reopened to first responders and relief flights.
- GPT became a hub for life-saving supplies, personnel, and fuel for emergency services.
- Airports throughout the region and country collaborated by sending crews and resources to expedite recovery efforts officially establishing the Southeast Airport Disaster Operations Group (SEADOG). Today, SEADOG continues to provide coordinated support to airports across the region in the wake of disasters.

### TRANSITION TO RECOVERY

- September 8, 2005: Commercial air service resumed, supporting residents, businesses, and recovery personnel.
- By December 15, 2005, GPT achieved 90% operational capacity, enabling sustained relief and economic activity.
- GPT’s ability to reopen quickly was critical to stabilizing the Gulf Coast during the early weeks of recovery.

### FEDERAL SUPPORT AND RECONSTRUCTION

- Millions in federal funding from FAA and FEMA supported rebuilding and modernization.
- Recovery efforts included terminal reconstruction, a new parking garage, and relocation of GA and cargo facilities.
- The airport emerged as a stronger and more resilient transportation hub by 2010.

**Recovery Project Funding = Approximately \$68M (Terminal Repairs, New Air Cargo Facility, New GA Area, New Rental Car Facility)**

## KEY RECOVERY TIMELINE

DATE/PERIOD	MILESTONE
Aug. 29, 2005	Hurricane Katrina devastates GPT & the MS Gulf Coast
Aug. 30, 2005	Runways reopen to first responder flights
Sept. 8, 2005	Commercial flights resume
Dec. 15, 2005	GPT reaches 90% operational capacity
Fall 2007	New rental car service center opens
Feb. 19, 2008	Terminal reconstruction complete
Fall 2008	Airport hotels open
Fall 2009	Three-story parking garage opens
2011	New GA FBO opens, completing major post-Katrina projects

