



# Plattsburgh: A New Player in Aerospace Innovation

**“Why Plattsburgh?” It’s a question being asked as the small New York community next to Montreal continues to host the fastest growing Aerospace & Transportation Equipment Cluster in North America.**

fDi Magazine has identified Plattsburgh as among the Top Ten Micropolitan “Cities of the Future” in North and South America. Billing itself as “Montreal’s US Suburb”, just one hour from downtown Montreal, Plattsburgh has been on an amazing journey since the closure of Plattsburgh Air Force Base in 1995. The redevelopment of that base’s massive aviation assets is just the centrepiece of a determination to create a synergistic cluster of Aerospace and Transportation Equipment manufacturers on the US side of the border next to Montreal’s massive aerospace cluster.

What to do with an Air Force Base with a 12,000-foot runway and a 12 million sq. foot concrete ramp? Reposition it as “Montreal’s US Airport and Aerospace Park”, starting with its development as a secondary passenger airport for the Montreal region. This gutsy move has established a new airport that has grown from zero to 160,000 enplanements in less than ten years, leading to the recent construction of a new terminal with five times the capacity and a US

Customs facility, allowing the handling of international arrivals of all kinds by this autumn. United Express recently announced the initiation of a Canadair jet service to Dulles beginning August 29th, creating one-stop global connectivity. Up to 85% of passengers are from Canada.

Phase Two involves eleven projects being carried out with \$43 million from New York State, focusing on future air, industrial and other aviation related business. Elements include an international cargo facility, the rehabilitation of hangars, and new and rehabilitated industrial space with flight line access.

But while all of this has been underway at the airport, the biggest story has been the development of a now 50 company Aerospace & Transportation Equipment Cluster employing 8,500 people. It is the outcome of a 20-year vision to create a synergistic, three-pronged cluster including rail, road and aerospace: rail, with Plattsburgh the site of Bombardier’s US railcar production operations; road, with Volvo Group choosing Plattsburgh for its US Nova Bus and Prevost production facilities; and aerospace, with the current development of Norsk Titanium, an innovator in additive manufacturing with its proprietary Rapid Plasma Deposition technology already producing parts for the

Boeing Dreamliner. This initiative has been backed by \$125 million from New York State to create a world class centre for Norsk Titanium’s production lines and for R&D.

All of this is supported by years of determined creation and linkage of innovative approaches to workforce development that can attract new involvement and support this cluster: 2016 saw the opening of a new Institute for Advanced Manufacturing; \$30 million in funding and equipment saw the establishment of Plattsburgh Aeronautical Institute; and Clarkson University continues to emerge as a globally recognised centre of excellence in advanced materials.

Why Plattsburgh, indeed. It is a classic story of a small community, confronted by an event that could have been devastating, that defined a role for itself in global aerospace and transportation equipment, creating a unique cluster that taps the natural supply chain, workforce and other synergies among aerospace, road and rail equipment. And now hosting technology innovations like Norsk Titanium and boldly organising a new North American Center of Excellence for Transportation Equipment as a model cluster support entity. The question being asked is an appropriate one, and the answers show a model for hub and cluster creation beyond the established sites in the world.