impactAIR:

AVIATION INVESTMENT POSITIVELY SHAPES ECONOMIC OUTCOMES IN AMERICA'S SMALLEST COMMUNITIES

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ron Kresha is a strategy and aviation specialist whose work focuses on the intersection of general aviation, community airports, and economic development. He is an original founding member and Chief Financial Officer of Golden Shovel Agency, where he has spent more than 15 years advising communities on aligning infrastructure, workforce, and investment strategies to support long-term growth. Over a 25-year career in economic development and related fields, his work has centered on helping rural and regional communities leverage underutilized assets—particularly airports—to improve accessibility, competitiveness, and resilience.

Kresha's professional background includes experience in education, information technology, and entrepreneurship. He spent ten years as a teacher and network engineer before co-founding Atomic Learning, an online education company launched in Little Falls, Minnesota. Under his leadership, Atomic Learning expanded into an internationally recognized learning platform and completed a private equity transaction in 2007. This experience in scaling technology-driven organizations informs his analytical approach to infrastructure strategy, funding models, and operational sustainability.

In parallel with his private-sector career, Kresha has served seven terms in the Minnesota House of Representatives, first elected in 2013. He has held senior leadership roles, including Chair or Co-Chair of the House Education Finance Committee, and has served on the Ways and Means Committee and the Commerce Finance and Policy Committee. His legislative work has addressed education finance, rural infrastructure, public safety, broadband access, and economic development. He contributed to the "11-point plan" for child protection reform as a member of the Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children, and led a $33 million state bonding initiative to establish the Minnesota Military Museum in Little Falls.

A licensed pilot since 1991, Kresha brings direct aviation operational experience to his policy and research work. He is accredited as a National Association of Flight Instructors (NAFI) Associate Master Flight Instructor and maintains Gold Seal Flight Instructor status. He has developed aviation education programs at the secondary level, mentors aspiring pilots, and flies part-time as a corporate pilot in Pilatus PC-12 and Cirrus aircraft. In the Minnesota Legislature, he has advanced aviation-focused initiatives including the establishment of Minnesota Aviation Day, legislation supporting community airport infrastructure, promotion of aviation education, and proposals aimed at protecting general aviation stakeholders from surveillance-based fee structures tied to ADS-B data. Kresha is the author of several research and policy-oriented publications examining aviation's role in community and regional development, including The Economic Development Edge Effect, From Runways to Revenue: Economic Benefits of Your Local Airport, and Strategies to Leverage the Community Airport. His work emphasizes practical, data-informed approaches to integrating aviation assets into broader economic development and transportation planning strategies.