Audit: DIA's failure to review pavement specs led to cracking, costing extra $2.9 million

Airport agrees to several recommendations issued by Denver auditors who reviewed two airfield projects

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Denver International Airport's failure to review technical standards for airfield projects contributed to extensive cracking of new pavement on a runway and cost DIA $2.9 million, city auditors reported Thursday.

DIA was on the hook for that amount on the major 2015 runway pavement replacement project because the contractor had followed the airport's technical specifications for pavement mixing, the audit found. The airport accepted partial responsibility and paid the settlement to Flatiron Constructors for work to replace 49 of 150 damaged concrete panels on the runway, on top of its $35.4 million contract. The rest of the panels were sealed.

Had the cracking been fully the contractor's fault, it could have had to pay for the repair.

The extra payment was revealed by an audit that looked at two large airfield construction projects managed by DIA's Airport Infrastructure Management Division, which oversees maintenance of airport runways, apron pavement and taxiways.

"Specifically, we found that the AIM Division lacks a sufficient process by which to ensure that the technical specifications provided to the contractor have been reviewed and approved," says the audit, issued by Auditor Tim O'Brien's office.

For the runway project, the audit says DIA relied on an old modification to its pavement standards, which are based on Federal Aviation Administration specifications. But that modified standard for the concrete mix was unnecessary, the report says. While the modification was intended to strengthen the concrete, it resulted in the production of excessive heat as the pavement solidified, damaging 150 of 700 poured panels.

"After the panel cracking incident, (the airport) took measures to improve its controls surrounding its project technical specifications," the audit says, including an outside review of its standards by an engineering consultant.

In his response to the audit, Mark A. Baker, DIA's senior vice president of airport infrastructure management, agreed to a recommendation for another safeguard. The project office will create a process to review technical specs for each project for accuracy and completeness before soliciting bids.

DIA agreed to implement several other audit recommendations by the end of September, including changes to ensure that bid documents are maintained properly and that bid advertisements no longer include incorrect or conflicting information about submission deadlines and other aspects.