



Vision for Gateway Airport keeps on growing

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The Arizona Republic

Oct. 16, 2007 09:23 AM

It has been studied by some of the nation's most respected land-use experts and they say its potential is unlimited.

Now "aerotropolis" is being used to describe the future of Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport and the nearly San Francisco-sized area around it.

The author of the concept, an acknowledged expert on aviation infrastructure, logistics and urban development, is coming to Mesa on Oct. 26 to discuss his vision of airports as generators of new American cities.

John D. Kasarda, Kenan Distinguished Professor of Entrepreneurship at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, will share his ideas during a "visioning workshop" at the Mesa Convention Center.

Kasarda also is a senior fellow of the Urban Land Institute, the prestigious land-use group that studied the Mesa-based airport in September and called it "the ignition for a 42-square mile economic engine that can transform the entire Phoenix metropolitan area."

"Now that you have the (General Motors) Proving Grounds (a 5,000-acre parcel east of the airport) there is a unique opportunity to take a blank campus and design an airport and development link that enriches not only the airport, but the entire metropolitan area," he said Tuesday in a telephone interview.

"Gateway is beginning to get traction now," he said. "The types of opportunities that evolve from development around the airport are going to be exceedingly rich if done in a visionary, not business-as-usual way."

The airport, Kasarda said, also is blessed with a higher-education component, a knowledge-based environment not normally found at airports, but an important part of an aerotropolis.

The aerotropolis concept, he said, appears to fit plans for the future of Gateway as it evolves into a reliever for up to 1.2 million annual passengers, an international cargo hub and education center producing highly-skilled employees for nearby aero-space companies.

The multi-faceted campus will provide the economic engine for a new community of corporate headquarters, executive homes and one of the world's leading research universities, say airport officials and developers.

Mike Pearson, professor of aviation law and management at Arizona State University/Polytechnic, and an air

traffic controller at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, said Gateway's explosive development will dramatically change its appearance over the next 10 years.

"You won't know it as it exists today," he said. "That's not only from an infrastructure standpoint but from looking at the evolution of the entire campus."

Wearing its new name, Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, as of Monday, the once historic airfield already has new development demands that will be challenging to support with infrastructure.

Financing that infrastructure will be daunting, said Jim Harris, a principal of Coffman Associates, an airport consulting firm with clients across the country. "A lot of planning needs to be done of up front to make sure finances are there to build that infrastructure," he said.

The price tag for those roads, utilities and other municipal services is likely to exceed \$1 billion, according to unofficial estimates cited by Roc Arnett, president of the East Valley Partnership, a coalition of business, government and education entities.

Growing costs are among reasons that Mesa and airport officials would like to accelerate construction of the Williams Gateway Freeway to link the airport area to Pinal County.

"With the development out there it became critical to seek earlier construction of the freeway and improve Power Road for another better access point into the airport," said Mesa Transportation Director Jeff Martin. "We'd like to accelerate the first mile of the freeway about four years."

The widening of Power Road to relieve congestion along the airport's western border begins this month and should continue for the next two years.

But plans for the freeway project are still on the drawing boards with a projected completion date of 2020.

Developers and airport officials say that much of the 3,000-plus acre airport will continue to be a construction zone over the next decade as private enterprise, including aviation heavies Cessna and Embraer, and Arizona State University/Polytechnic and Chandler Gilbert Community College expand and build new facilities.

"Cessna and Embraer's decisions to build major maintenance facilities at the airport are certainly indicative of how they feel about the Phoenix metro area and the airport as a key component of their future plans," Harris said.

Loop 202, which bends from the north to the west at the airport's northern doorstep, will be the airport's major connection for the next several years, say Valley transportation officials. Bus service and light rail have not entered serious dialogue about the airport's transportation links.

Barclay Dick, director of the Arizona Department of Transportation's Aeronautics Division, said the airport's emergence as a reliever to serve smaller cities and secondary airports instead of wooing major carriers like U.S. Airways appears to bode well for Gateway.

With forecasts of passenger traffic continuing to climb and congestion delaying flights at Sky Harbor, Dick said Gateway could grow into its role as a major reliever more rapidly than many expect.

"Sky Harbor, unfortunately, is pretty compact. It doesn't have a lot of room for growth unless the city starts spending huge amounts of money and that would be a dollar figure that would stagger all of us. So the additional air service the Valley needs can be accommodated at Gateway."

That should get its biggest boost yet Oct. 25, said Harris, when Allegiant Air launches low-cost passenger operations that will serve 13 markets by Nov. 21. Phoenix-Mesa will be the fourth base for the airlines, which already provides scheduled service to more than 50 cities across the nation.