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Lancaster Airport Set for Expansion

By Sherry Long

As the southern Dallas County area continues to boom with commercial growth, the Lancaster airport is trying to keep up.

Assistant City Manager Jan Belcher said an expansion would allow the airport to accommodate larger corporate jets, which needed longer runways to land and take-off.

"We can take some of the largest business jets," Belcher said noting the airport would be able to accommodate dual-wheel Gulfstream 5 planes when the development was complete.

Two small corporate jets were already flying executives into the airport.

According to a recent study conducted by city officials, executives driving from the Lancaster Airport could arrive at the Central Dallas Business District quicker than if they had driven from Love Field due to the light flow of traffic in the southern Dallas County region.

"They come here because we have easy transportation to wherever they want to go," Belcher said.

The 306-acre municipal airport would use a \$ 8.8 million grant from the Texas Department of Transportation Aviation Division to expand the runway to 6,500 feet from its current 5,000 feet and overlay the existing runway to accept heavier planes.

Environmental assessments, engineering studies and at least 100 more acres must be purchased on the south-end before any groundbreaking could actually begin, as 90 percent of the project would be paid using federal funds.

The city would be required to match 10 percent of the grant using local money.

Regional leaders were also interested in the airport's growth as the River of Trade Corridor Coalition and the Dallas NAFTA Trade Corridor were looking to develop another cargo airport on eastern edge of the metroplex.

Fort Worth's Alliance Airport, developed by Ross Perot Jr. in the early 1990s, was the only cargo airport currently serving the Dallas-Fort Worth region. Mesquite's Metro Airport was another facility being considered as a cargo airport.

Dallas Councilman Bill Blaydes, who serves as chairman of the Dallas NAFTA Trade Corridor, said Lancaster would be an ideal location for another cargo airport due to its close proximity to Interstates 45, 20, 35 and the Union Pacific Intermodal Railroad in Wilmer-Hutchins.

"It is definitely sitting there in first place because it is so close to major intermodals," Blaydes said.

Both airports have the opportunity to eventually expand their runways up to 10,000 feet since they are surrounded by farming land, Blaydes said.

As a waiting list was filling up there was additional space surrounding the airport to allow more hangers to be constructed.

New water and sewer lines were expected to be installed to serve the south end of the airport during the next few months using \$107,425 divided equally among the Lancaster Economic Development Board and the city's water/sewer fund, Belcher said.