

Future bright for Gateway development

'Aerotropolis' concept reported to excite many

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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-size area around it.

The author of the concept, an acknowledged expert on aviation infrastructure, logistics and urban development, came to Mesa last week to discuss Gateway and its bright future.

John D. Kasarda is the Kenan Distinguished Professor of Entrepreneurship at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

He shared his expertise during a "visioning workshop" at the Mesa Convention Center, including a look at other airports as generators of new American cities.

"Now that you have the (General Motors) Proving Ground, (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 during a telephone interview before the talk.

"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.

His presentation in Mesa looked at the airport's future and its planning needs in the context of what is taking place at airports around the world.

Kasarda is a senior fellow of the Urban Land Institute, the prestigious land-use research 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."

Kasarda said the aerotropolis concept is emerging "because of the advantages airports provide to [business](#) in the new speed-driven, globally networked economy."

"Airports," he wrote in an article examining the concept, "are no longer simply places where airplanes

land and passengers and cargo transit."

"Like the manufacturing industry," he said, "the service sector has increasingly found airports to be an attractive location. Airports have become magnets for regional corporate headquarters, trade representative [offices](#), professional associations and information-intensive firms that require executives and staff to undertake frequent long-distance travel."

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 aerospace companies.

The multifaceted 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."

Sporting its new name, Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, the historic airfield has new development demands that will be challenging to support with infrastructure, said Jim Harris, a principal of Coffman Associates, an airport consulting firm that has clients across the country. The price tag for those roads, utilities and other municipal services is likely to exceed \$1 billion, according to unofficial estimates cited by airport officials and others.

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

Mesa and airport officials said they would like to accelerate construction of the Williams Gateway Freeway, which would link the airport area to Pinal County. The freeway's projected completion date is 2020.

Much of the 3,000-acre airport will continue to be under construction throughout the next decade as companies such as Cessna and Embraer and public entities like ASU Polytechnic and Chandler-Gilbert Community College expand and build new facilities.

Loop 202, at the airport's northern doorstep, will be the airport's major connection for the foreseeable future, transportation officials in the Valley say. Bus service and light rail have not entered serious dialogue.

Barclay Dick, director of the Arizona Department of Transportation's Aeronautics Division, said that the airport's role as a burgeoning reliever that attracts regional airlines to serve secondary airports instead of trying to recruit major carriers appears to be working well.

"Sky Harbor, unfortunately, is pretty compact. . . . So the additional air service the Valley needs can be accommodated at Gateway," he said.

Allegiant Air appears to be the catalyst for that boost, Harris said.

The airline is launching low-cost passenger operations that are expected to serve 13 markets by Nov. 21. Gateway will be the fourth base for the airline, which provides scheduled service to more than 50 cities across the nation.