



Maricopa considers general-aviation facility

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The Arizona Republic

Aug. 26, 2007 08:09 PM

Maricopa is considering developing or building a general-aviation airport that could serve pilots from Chandler to Goodyear.

A new study by Coffman and Associates concluded that an airport is worth further consideration as it could bring the city \$20 million to \$50 million annually and more jobs close to home.

Ed Beauvais, Maricopa's aviation director, said it could bring much-needed hangar space to the southern Phoenix area, as well as to that area of Pinal County. The Chandler Municipal Airport has had a waiting list for hangars for more than a decade.

"If you can't get your airplane into the Chandler airport and you own an airplane, and a new airport is built in Maricopa, that's pretty attractive," said Beauvais, the founder of America West Airlines who was hired two years ago by Maricopa. Greg Chenoweth, manager of the Chandler airport, said there are about 225 city and private hangars at that airport and there are plans to add another 100.

"There is plenty of aviation to go around," he said. "There are nine or 10 airports in the Phoenix area and all of them stay busy. One more would probably stay busy, too."

The Coffman study said it would cost at least \$45 million to build a new airport in Maricopa from scratch. Beauvais said it is rare for new airports to be built, even though federal funds pay for most costs. He said the city also will look at existing airports in the area to see if one could be redeveloped and expanded.

Two prospects he mentioned are the Estrella Sailport, a gliderport on state trust land in an area Maricopa wants to annex to the west, and Phoenix Regional Airport, a little-used airport southeast of Maricopa that the Ak-Chin Indian Community recently purchased. Beauvais said he will talk to Ak-Chin officials to see what their plans are.

The study suggested that if Maricopa decides to build, it should quickly purchase at least 600 acres to protect it from residential encroachment.

It also suggested the city plan on a runway at least 5,500 feet long that could eventually grow to 8,300 feet to handle all types of corporate jets, as well as recreational planes and flight instructors.

Airport development has recently become a hot topic, with a number of communities trying to copy Scottsdale Airport's successful model of having an industrial airpark next to an airport.

A version of this story may have appeared in your community Republic.