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# Report suggests changes at Williams Gateway

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Privatizing Williams Gateway Airport and extending light rail to promote the airport as a jobs and education center are among a list of recommendations in a new report to be released Friday by an internationally respected land-use study group.

Roc Arnett, executive director of the East Valley Partnership, a regional coalition of business, education and government leaders that sponsored the review, estimated Thursday that infrastructure needs outlined in the report would cost about \$1 billion.

The review by an Urban Land Institute panel, said privatization has been successful at such airports as Alliance Airport in Fort Worth, Texas, and shifts much of the development burden from the airport authority to a contractor.

"To meet the goals of creating a major job center with 96,000 jobs and 68,000 students over the next 25 years, it may be necessary to take a more aggressive approach to the management of the airport, including operations, marketing, financing, strategic planning and development," the report said.

The 39-page document heralds the potential of the airport and a 52-square-mile study around it to become an economic-development "jewel," but warns that there is no "clear and common vision" and coordinated land-use planning to harness the area's relentless growth.

The findings constitute a development guidebook and identify specific obstacles to balanced land-use planning such as numerous county islands and checkerboard development.

But the ability to finance essential infrastructure remains in question, the report said, with Arizona's limited number of local financing options, Mesa's lack of a property tax and "acute shortages of funds" in the study area's other jurisdictions.

The report mentions the use of community facilities districts used by some Valley communities to finance infrastructure and services through the issuance of tax-exempt bonds, but stops short of recommending it.

Despite opening of the Santan Freeway last year, the report said missing arterial links within and around the study area restrict travel and pose delays for expansion of planned land uses.

Also absent is public transportation for students at Arizona State University Polytechnic and Chandler Gilbert Community College at the airport. Both campuses, said the report, are oriented to commuter students and would be "well served" by immediate extensions of Valley Metro bus service. Extension of the light-rail system should also be "emphasized."

The report said it will require "hard work, creativity, and a single-minded determination" by Mesa, Gilbert, Queen Creek, the Gila River Indian Community to make the study area attain lofty expectations.

"The airport has not yet lived up to its potential as a moneymaker, as Sky Harbor has done for Phoenix," the report said. "In fact, the panel members believe that the airport may not reach a break-even level, much less profitability, within the time horizon predicted in its business plan if business as usual is allowed to continue."

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