

Dazzling future foreseen for Gateway Airport

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In less than 20 years, millions of people a year will be coming and going through a dazzling new aerial gateway to the Southeast Valley.

Its small ground-level terminal will have been replaced by one capable of handling millions of people a year. A half-mile of pavement will have been added to one runway, allowing it to handle the most gargantuan cargo planes ever built.

And the airport will be both the beneficiary and generator of an economic engine with international clout. Those are elements of a master plan adopted this week for Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport after a two-year study.

Airport director Lynn Kusy said the master plan forecasts 270,000 passengers in 2009 and 2.2 million by 2027.

If development in the area really takes off, Kusy said, the 2027 passenger count could be more in the neighborhood of 5 million. Outfitting the airport to handle all those passengers and a vastly enlarged cargo service will be hugely expensive.

Of the nearly \$755 million estimated cost, Kusy said, more than \$400 million would be eligible for federal funding, and \$11 million could come from the state.

But that would leave the airport and its local-government sponsors to come up with \$342 million.