

## FAA grant will expand Gateway, add gates

**Ed Taylor**, Tribune

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Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport's role as a reliever airport for Sky Harbor International in Phoenix is expected to be enhanced by the expansion of the east Mesa airport's passenger terminal.

The Federal Aviation Administration's \$8.9 million grant to enlarge the Charles L. Williams Passenger Terminal was announced Monday by local and federal officials.



The Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport Authority on Monday announced an expansion of the passenger terminal at the airport.

Nearly 1 million people will be able to arrive and depart annually through the terminal once the expansion is completed, Mesa Mayor Scott Smith said. That compares with about 600,000 passengers expected to pass through the terminal this year.

"This will affect the entire region," Smith said. "As we have seen in other metropolitan areas, successful reliever satellite airports build the economy of the entire region."

The FAA agreed to the grant for the expansion because of Gateway's commercial potential, said Mark McClardy, manager of the agency's Western-Pacific Region Airports Division.

"This airport is one I have been watching very closely, because its potential is unlimited," he said. "This airport is really a great investment."

Queen Creek Mayor Art Sanders, who is chairman of the Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport Authority, said the project was earned on its merits because of the rapid increase in number of passengers flying Allegiant Air flights through the terminal.

"Our communities have earned the right to expanded passenger service as Allegiant Air repeatedly fills their aircraft," he said.

The FAA has provided \$81 million for improvements to Gateway since it was created in the 1990s as a redevelopment of Williams Air Force Base, he said.

The terminal money will be made available through the FAA's Military Airport Program, which pays for conversion of former military bases to civilian airports. The money is not part of President Barack Obama's economic stimulus program, Sanders said.

The grant will cover 95 percent of the cost of the project, with the remainder of the \$9.5 million expense coming from the airport authority's own money and possibly money from the Arizona Department of Transportation, said Gateway Director Lynn Kusy.

Site work on the project, which will be built north of the existing terminal, is expected to begin in early October, he said. Officials hope the expansion will be completed in time for the Thanksgiving/winter vacation rush late next year, he said.

The project will add two gates to the four already available at the terminal, allowing Allegiant Air to expand to more destinations from Gateway.

The new building will add 25,000 square feet to the 33,000 square feet of the existing passenger terminal. It will include baggage-claim areas, car rental desks and space for greeting arriving passengers.

Boarding passengers will continue to enter through the existing terminal, which contains ticketing and security areas, Kusy said.

Las Vegas-based Allegiant Air is flying to, or plans to fly to, 19 destinations from the Gateway terminal and has expressed interest in further expansion from its Gateway hub. The airline has found a profitable niche flying vacation passengers to the east Mesa airport from mid-sized cities in colder climates.

A previous \$3 million expansion of a passenger terminal was built through a loan from Allegiant in 2008. That expansion took 2 1/2 months and added a 10,080-square-foot annex and extra parking.

Brian Davis, director of airport planning for Allegiant Air, said the airline is "excited" about the airport's latest addition and "all that we can do with that extra square footage."

He said Gateway administrators "have demonstrated a commitment to constructing facilities that are comfortable to the customer but that have an eye on efficiency and the economics that allow us to be successful ... and pass that on to the customer through affordable airfares."