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Gateway readies for next growth phase

By Andre Bowser
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Passengers check in at the ticket counter at Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport for their departing flights on May 22, 2009.

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The next phase in growth is descending upon Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, and officials have high hopes that they'll receive a boost from a share of \$23.7 million in federal funds.

Gateway flies into bright future [<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/139487>]

State airports will share the funds, and Gateway's portion has not yet been determined.

So far, more than \$2 million in federal funds have been secured by the airport for runway expansions and other development projects, including plans for a new building. But officials said much more will be needed before their development plans take off.

The first phase in the airport's growth included a \$3 million passenger terminal that at present sees more than 300,000 passengers coming and going, said airport spokesman Brian Sexton. He said the growth plan was necessary because passenger service is expected to double in 2009.

In the second phase, a 25,000-square-foot building is slated for the present tree-lined park and gazebo area beside the existing passenger terminal.

"Unfortunately, we'll have to remove the trees and gazebo area," Sexton said, pointing to where one of the large, aged branches fell near an unoccupied picnic table. "The trees have been here since the airport was an Air Force base."

While family, friends and acquaintances of passengers won't get to sidle up next to the fence and wave to guests arriving or departing, there are plans for an air-conditioned waiting area and new baggage areas, among other amenities.

"We'll build up the loop of the road leading into the passenger terminal" as well, Sexton said. The present fire station will be demolished and replaced by a new structure as part of the third phase in the airport's planning.

Sitting alone in the current passenger terminal waiting for a flight to Eugene, Ore., Dot Hornsby of Gold Canyon said she anticipated the renovations with great expectations.

"Great - it would be convenient," said Hornsby, who makes the trip between her two homes every couple of months. "It's only 20 minutes to this airport from my house."

Last week, a gaggle of Wildcats - the baseball team from the University of Arizona - crowded one of the entrances to the airport, many of them wearing red team shirts, as well as very dark blue pants - the team's colors.

Baseball bags in tow, about 20 young men wore confident faces as they prepared to fly north to battle with the Oregon Ducks.

Blair Willis, a spokesman for UA's baseball team, looked nerve-wracked as he wrangled the athletes onto the flight for what he described as a duck-hunting expedition in Eugene.

"We have a three-game series that starts tomorrow," Willis said after taking a charter bus to the airport from Tucson for a direct flight. "It's more cost-effective to fly out of here. You know how everybody is trying to balance their budgets these days."



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