

## Aerotropolis Would Be an Economic Engine

By Joe Craver

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San Diego is blessed with a magnificent seaport that, in historical terms, was once the primary source of economic prosperity for the region and the means by which San Diego connected to the larger world.

The “seaport” of the 21st century is an airport. Today, airports are part of a vast network connecting the world, point to point. In that way, airports now play the role once held exclusively by seaports: that of a primary economic engine and connector to the world at large for the communities they serve.

Indeed even a regional airport with a mile-long runway is sufficient to launch a modern business aircraft on a 7,000-mile nonstop flight to a distant locale.

### **Flight Plan**

In recognition of the unique role of airports will play in the future of our region, a group of local community leaders are engaged in forming a plan for future sustainable development and economic expansion around a local regional airport. Based on the internationally known concept of an “aerotropolis,” the economic development model acknowledges the key role of airports as drivers of economic activity. As such, the aerotropolis model is used to structure development around a new or expanding airport.

What makes the local application of the aerotropolis model so unique is that the concept is being applied to Gillespie Field in San Diego’s East County. For the first time in the region, the aerotropolis model will be used to bolster the growth of an existing economic area.

Formed under the auspices of the East County Economic Development Council, the Steering Committee for “Aerotropolis at Gillespie Field” is well along in its mission to leverage the potential of Gillespie Field to foster new and expanded growth in East County. The airport, with a 5,342-foot main runway and a full complement of aviation services, is linked via key roadway arteries — state Routes 52, 125 and Interstate 8 — to the communities of El Cajon, Santee, Lakeside, Spring Valley and into the industrial areas of East San Diego, Poway and the unincorporated areas of the East and nearby South County.

The county, which operates Gillespie Field, is in the process of opening for airport expansion an added 70 acres. The cities of Santee and El Cajon are in the midst of siting new industrial and hotel projects near the airport that complement the steering committee’s vision to develop an aerotropolis around Gillespie Field.

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## **The Potential Is There**

A recent Cal-Trans airport study names Gillespie as one of a handful of California airports most suited for sustainable economic growth with a unique potential for supporting the growth of new jobs. The steering committee absolutely agrees with the county and Cal Trans that Gillespie is poised to become a significant engine for future of sustainable economic development. Gillespie Field can play an important role in supporting airport-related development that will not be possible at the other airports in the region, including Lindbergh Field.

To make the vision of an aerotropolis around Gillespie Field a reality, the East County Economic Development Council led the formation of a steering committee comprised of individuals from throughout the greater San Diego region who bring a wealth of background in community leadership to this task. They include: Cindy Miles, chancellor of the Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District and a national leader in traditional, online, and customized training to prepare new workers; Jerry Hollingsworth, long time East County businessman and community supporter, board member of the San Diego Regional Fire and Emergency Services Foundation; Reo Carr, executive editor of the San Diego Business Journal; and Bill Fischbeck, East County land use attorney and community planning supporter.

Thanks in part to a grant from the San Diego Foundation; the ECEDC has been able to provide the steering committee with initial staff support, led by East County EDC CEO, Jo Marie Diamond.

“The steering committee is off to a good start,” notes committee vice-chair Miles. “What we now need is a broad base of support from the regional business, education and government communities to make the aerotropolis at Gillespie Field a reality.”

Echoing the words of Miles, I invite interested parties all parts of the greater San Diego community to join our effort to shape sustainable economic growth around this vital community asset to assist in making an aerotropolis at Gillespie Field a reality.

*Joe Craver chairs the ECEDC Aerotropolis at Gillespie Steering Committee.*