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Airport Authority CEO Urges Legislature to Support Detroit Region Aerotropolis

LANSING, Mich. (Nov. 5, 2009)—The proposed Detroit Region Aerotropolis offers a unique development opportunity worthy of statewide support, Wayne County Airport Authority CEO Lester Robinson urged state leaders today in Lansing.

In testimony provided before the Michigan House of Representatives Transportation Committee, Robinson acknowledged Aerotropolis opponents' concern that the legislature's special consideration of the Aerotropolis would necessarily hamper development elsewhere in the state, but clarified that, "The Aerotropolis does not compete with our core cities because its development focus is not the same."

"I understand that some communities worry that Michigan's core cities and communities will be unable to compete with the Aerotropolis for new development. This assumption is false because what the Aerotropolis will attract are businesses that desire to operate next to a major, international, hub airport, which no other community in Michigan is ready to offer," Robinson added.

Robinson further asserted that the presence of two major airports—Detroit Metro and Willow Run—just seven miles apart with plenty of developable land in between not only positions Metro Detroit to lead the State's economic resurgence but gives Michigan a competitive advantage against other Aerotropolis developments nationwide.

The Aerotropolis, or "airport city", is a concept pioneered by John Kasarda, Dean of the Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise and Professor of Entrepreneurship at the University of North Carolina, which suggests that as air travel has overtaken roads and shipping as the primary avenue of global trade, new urban cores have the potential to form around major international airports the way they once did on the banks of rivers, and later, around roads and highways.

Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano has made the development of the Detroit Region Aerotropolis a central focus of his Administration frequently citing the jobs and economic opportunities such a development would bring.

Aerotropolis-type developments have already been successful in Europe and Asia, as well as near Dallas/Ft. Worth, Louisville and Memphis area airports. Robinson also pointed to a similar development underway near Chicago's O'Hare International Airport that has been constrained by the airport's inability to expand—placing Detroit, with its existing airfield capacity already surpassing Chicago, at a competitive advantage for airport-centered development.

The Airport Authority, which was created by the State Legislature in 2002, is an independent entity responsible for the operation of both Detroit Metro Airport and Willow Run Airport. Although the Airport Authority is prohibited by federal law from funding development outside of the airport proper, it nonetheless recognizes its central role of providing the airport core that makes such an Aerotropolis possible.

Having welcomed more than 35 million passengers in 2008, Detroit Metro Airport is the busiest airport in Michigan and among the world's largest air transportation hubs. DTW is the second-largest hub for the world's largest airline, Delta, and offers non-stop service between Southeast Michigan and more than 160 destinations around the globe.

Having secured its place in history by the critical role it played in the mobilization effort for World War II, Willow Run Airport now serves an equally critical role as a major air cargo and general aviation facility. A study conducted by the University of Michigan-Dearborn in 2005 estimated the combined two airports' statewide economic impact to be upwards of \$7.8 billion and as the basis for more than 74,000 Michigan jobs.

“If given the support by the State Legislature that it deserves, one can only begin to imagine the potential a Detroit Region Aerotropolis would have to fuel economic development across Michigan,” said Robinson.

For a copy of Robinson's complete testimony, visit www.metroairport.com.

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