Edwards planning push for new regional airport

By MARSHA SHULER
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Gov.-elect Edwin Edwards said Wednesday he is pursuing location of a regional airport between Baton Rouge and New Orleans that would be connected to the two cities by a rapid transit facility.

The airport would replace the New Orleans International Airport, which cannot expand sufficiently at its Kenner site to handle increased traffic demands.

Edwards said he plans to introduce legislation in the 1992 session creating a regional airport commission.

Meanwhile, Edwards said efforts are under way to find a suitable site. He said the challenge is to find 25,000 acres of land that “does not affect wetlands and a large number of people.”

Edwards said a recent proposal involved a site near Sorrento, which he said New Orleans Mayor Sidney Barthelemy thinks is too far from the Crescent City.

But Edwards said the site is not really that far away when you look at the location of airports in other states.

He specifically mentioned the location of Denver’s new regional airport and LaGuardia in New York, both of which are located quite a distance out. He said a rapid transit connection would resolve that problem.

With construction of a new airport, Edwards said New Orleans International should be converted into a general aviation facility and also a distribution center. He said New Orleans Lakefront Airport would be closed and the land “put to some higher use.”
Edwards said Jefferson Parish residents are opposed to further expansion of New Orleans International Airport.

"The people in Kenner are very upset about the noise," he said.

In addition, Edwards said, the airport will not be able to handle the required volume of air traffic 10 years from now, especially if casino gambling is approved in New Orleans.

Edwards said there is a need for two parallel runways, which the current facility lacks.

Edwards said financing will be a major hurdle. He said he hopes to tap federal funds and get some advance from airlines to get the project off the ground. He would like to finance the remainder with revenue bonds so it will not affect the full faith and credit of the state.

Gov. Buddy Roemer had been talking about a two-state regional airport with Mississippi Gov. Ray Mabus but nothing came of that.

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