Baton Rouge should proceed with its $219 million airport expansion, Gov. Edwin Edwards said Wednesday, making it clear that the project is needed even though a new major regional airport is in the works.

Edwards wants to build an airport between Baton Rouge and New Orleans to replace the New Orleans International Airport that is outgrowing its Kenner location.

That announcement and Edwards mentioning he had seen a proposal for a Sorrento site set off speculation about the future of the Baton Rouge project.

It also prompted those connected with development of an airport south of Gonzales to start thinking about the potential of using its site for the larger facility Edwards envisions.

Edwards quashed both thoughts Wednesday.

On the Baton Rouge situation, he said: "This airport business is totally unrelated to Baton Rouge. Any plans that Baton Rouge may have for expansion or renovation should be on-
going without regard to that. I think that the airport at Baton Rouge needs to be expanded.

Edwards said the growing number of passengers using the facilities and airlines indicates the need for expansion.

"I would not want to either deter or alter one way or the other any airport plans here in Baton Rouge relative to the regional airport," he said.

In addition, he said the major regional airport he envisions is years down the road.

Edwards said the Louisiana Regional Airport under construction south of Gonzales should also proceed as planned and serve those area needs.

And he warned that he just mentioned the Sorrento site as an example of one plan that he had seen. He said others smarter than he in those matter will be involved in site selection.

He said New Orleans area groups are looking for an area in eastern New Orleans and he understands that former Gov. Buddy Roemer's administration was looking at a St. Tammany site.

"My problem is I doubt that you can find 25,000 acres close to New Orleans where you would not have to displace a large number of people and where it would be accepted environmentally," Edwards said.

He said the St. Tammany site would have logistic problems because it would require travelers to cross Lake Pontchartrain.

"The point needs to be made that nobody knows where the airport is going to go," Edwards said. "We are going to have to get people who are expert in that area and let them make a survey of a radius around New Orleans and determine the best location for us.

"The point needs to be made that in my opinion this airport is a regional airport for South Louisiana and the Southeast United States and it seems to me that putting it between two metropolitan areas which are growing together and will continue to grow together for the next century will be the better location if it can meet Federal Aviation Administration requirements and environmental requirements.

"If not then we may have to look at some other site."

Edwards did not dismiss outright a joint venture with the state of Mississippi but he said he doubts that Mississippi will be interested in helping build a facility in Louisiana.

A joint venture had been discussed during the Roemer administration.

"Certainly if Mississippi wants to join us, fine," Edwards said. "But I doubt seriously they will have any political or economic desire to put money into an airport anywhere in Louisiana."