Experts predict need for larger airport

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As workmen put the final touches on a $5.6 million expansion of Metro Airport's terminal, consultants say an even larger facility will be necessary between the mid-1980s and the year 2000.

Cress and Associates, along with local Dawson Engineers, is finalizing its update of the master plan for Ryan Field, and the consultants see demand growing faster than the airport has been able to keep pace.

The consultants put a price tag on the improvements of $61.9 million by the year 2000 in then-year dollars — if growth forecasts are correct and all recommendations are followed.

The Screen Administration is seeking $11.7 million in grants for improvements at Metro Airport in the form of a third runway for light planes, noise barriers and runway extensions.

That money does figure into the overall cost consultants' estimate.

The study predicts the number of passengers per year boarding planes at Metro will increase 57 percent between 1985 and 2000. The consultants forecast 362,000 will board in 1985 and 626,000 will do so in the year 2000.

There were 274,303 persons boarding airplanes at Metro in 1982, Aviation Director Iray Ledoux said.

While consultants say the runways and other land-based facilities (with the proposed third runway) will be able to handle the demand, the terminal building itself will likely require enlargement.

Expansion of the the general aviation facilities which service light, private and corporate planes will also be needed.

"The capacity of the terminal building will likely be exceeded by the mid-1980s, although effective space utilization could avoid the need for major terminal building envelope expansion until the third phase of the planning period," the study said. The third phase is 1991-2000.

In Phase I (present to 1985), the consultants say expansion needed includes the general aviation parking areas, a third runway and taxiway, noise barriers, waste disposal area, airport parking, helicopter landing area, fixed base operator sites and access, a link with I-110, extension of the shortest of the current two runways and

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reconstruction of South Airport Drive. Much of this is already on the drawing board and the funding is being sought.

Phase II (1985-1990) plans call for terminal expansion, parking areas near the terminal, expansion of the west general aviation areas, relocation of air cargo facilities and more work on the taxiways.

Phase III would see more runway extensions, development of the last general aviation area and access to that area on the north side of the airport, and further taxiway and road improvement. Ledoux said he basically agrees with the study's conclusions.

"If predictions go the way they are and people continue to fly . . . we will have to expand in Phase I, II and III. Definitely we will have to go to Phase I and Phase II and people continue to fly . . . we will have to otherwise, you'll have to look at it," Ledoux said.

Phase III would be evaluated sometime about 1985 and "unless demand indicates otherwise, you'll have to look at it," Ledoux said.

There's a lot of options that could be had. Anytime you look at any plan, your situation may change," Ledoux said. He calls the master plan update a guideline for the future.

If the consultants are right, there will be a good bit of expansion in the future.

"While there is a possibility that additional aircraft gate construction will be necessary in the late 1980s, it is more likely that gate utilization will be increased by the airlines, thereby reducing gate requirements," it says. The gates are where passengers receive boarding passes and are loaded onto the planes.

"Further, the building area devoted to the baggage claim function is inadequate and will become critical with the passage of time," the study says.

In the terminal area, year 2000 demand will require more airline parking positions, departure lounge expansion and expansions in the outbound baggage and baggage claim areas. Additionally, minor expansion of the waiting lobby, restaurant and lounge area and corridors will be required. Another 785 auto parking spaces will be needed by the year 2000, as well as a new air cargo building," the study says.

The consultants assessed the terminal building and found:

- The current runways are oriented so that "no other runways are needed for further wind coverage."
- The additional runway planned, for light planes parallel to the current northeast-southwest runway, should meet capacity demands.
- "The present taxiway and exit configuration on runway 4-22 (northeast-southwest) is far from ideal. An analysis and rating of exit effectiveness revealed that not enough exits are available and those that do exist are generally in the wrong location. This results in excessive runway occupancy times during landing operations, with additional increases in delay for other arriving and departing aircraft. Taxiways on the southeast-northwest runway need improvement, too."
- The runway strength is adequate and can handle a Boeing 757. The 757 is typical of the next largest class of aircraft to operate at the airport when larger planes are brought in to meet demands.
- Additional lighting and runway end identifier lights and visual approach slope indicator lights are needed on both approaches and medium intensity runway way lights.

The consultants assessed the terminal building and found:

- There appears to be sufficient room for additional security devices and for airline operations/fight planning areas.
- After 1990, additional space will be needed for ticket counters and airline offices. "The need to accommodate additional certificated or commuter airlines beyond the number now serving Baton Rouge would significantly increase the requirements," which call for 900 square feet more of ticket counter space.

The airport apron for parking and maneuvering next to the terminal will also require expansion.

Almost 12,000 square feet of additional apron will be needed if the demand eventually brings the number of aircraft serving the airport at one given time up to six. (Currently there is room for three at the loading bridges and a fourth parked away from the terminal building.)

The number of gates for additional aircraft will need to go up from three to five for commercial, plus one extra for non-scheduled flights. An additional commuter airline gate would be needed by the year 2000, an increase of one.

Parking facilities, which now total 466 spaces, is sufficient to meet current demand. "After 1985, significant deficiencies appear that will require additional construction during the 1986-1990 time frame.

"Terminal curbside deficiency will become severe by the mid-1980s. Only half of the year 2000 requirement is presently available at Ryan Terminal."

Air cargo facilities could be expanded at the facility.

But there is "a lack of data concerning total air cargo movements. . . . Conservatively, there is probably a demand at the present of half again as much floor space as is available."

The report suggests building a new air cargo facility is such a manner as to be expandable "bay by bay" in a linear fashion as demand arises.

"The present Crash/Fire/Rescue (CFR) facility is adequate to serve Metro Airport's needs through the turn of the century, in accordance with present FAA certification standards. No additional construction requirement is foreseen" unless reallocation is needed in the future.

If corporate aviation demands exceed the three hangar facilities now being used, facilities should be planned for the north and east sides of the airport.

The consultants foresee growth in general aviation facilities to be mostly in the east (along Plank Road) and north areas of the airport.