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NEW ORLEANS — The Louisiana Airport Authority may take a year or two before deciding on a site for a new international airport between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, according to an Airport Authority official.

The Airport Authority’s site information committee will spend the next six to nine months listening to various airport consultants to gather background information on the process of planning and building the $3 billion airport, committee chairman Edward Markle said during a committee meeting here Thursday.

“We’re trying to get as much information as we can,” Markle said after the meeting. “We’re a year or maybe two from recommending where this thing ought to go.”

This is in sharp contrast to a prediction two weeks ago from Airport Authority Vice Chairman Gerald “Nicky” Prejean, who claimed the site selection could be completed within five to six months and that the authority probably will choose a 33,000-acre site in eastern Ascension Parish.

Airport Authority Chairman Melba Steeg objected to Prejean’s statements, saying the Airport Authority is in the preliminary phases of its work. Prejean later apologized.

Markle and Steeg reiterated their pledge Thursday to work with New Orleans Aviation Board officials, who are working on their own 5,000-acre international airport project in the New Orleans area.

The Aviation Board hired KPMG Peat Marwick, which studied 17 sites and has since narrowed the list to three: the current international airport in Kenner, the Pontchartrain Lakefront in eastern New Orleans, and an area north of Slidell.

The Aviation Board should receive a recommendation on the best of the three sites in the next three to four months, said Edward Levell Jr., acting aviation director of New Orleans International Airport.

KPMG Peat Marwick officials will brief the Airport Authority on their site research at the Nov. 17 Airport Authority meeting in New Orleans.

Airport Authority members have said they will not duplicate those studies in their own search for a 25,000-acre international airport site.

There has been some discussion that New Orleans International Airport could concentrate on passenger traffic while the larger new international airport would specialize in cargo traffic.

However the chairman of the New Orleans Aviation Board, Joe Knecht, said most air cargo is transported in the bellies of passenger airplanes rather than cargo airplanes.

“They are not going to make two stops and two drops for anything,” Knecht said.

The Airport Authority’s site information committee also heard from officials with Frederic R. Harris Inc., an engineering consulting firm that has done work at O’Hare International Airport near Chicago, JFK International Airport in New York, Los Angeles International Airport and Miami International Airport.

Martin Cawley of Frederick R. Harris Inc. said Louisiana can expect competition for Federal Aviation Administration funds from groups planning international airports in Fayetteville, Ark., North Carolina, Birmingham, Ala., and Martin County, Fla.

“The wild cards here are the airlines and their problems financially,” Cawley said, adding that it could take up to eight years to build the airport.

“As far as I’m concerned it’s more like 16,” Levell said, noting the legal and environmental problems the New Orleans Aviation Board has encountered.