Private airstrip planned with industrial park

By MIKE DUNNE
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Consultants looking into the future of Baton Rouge Metro Airport at the turn of the century see the need for another airport, and only one airstrip is known to be on the drawing boards for the area.

Several area investors are planning a West Baton Rouge Parish industrial park and are obtaining a license from the Federal Aviation Administration for an airstrip to accompany the park.

A spokesman from the group says the airstrip license is for a privately-owned, privately-operated air facility for the industrial park and not eyed as a relief facility for Ryan Field.

State aviation officials are going to give the East Feliciana Police Jury a pitch for putting a general aviation facility in that parish. That will be during a public hearing at noon Feb. 7 in Clinton.

Consultants Cress and Associates see the need for another airport to handle the planes and passengers demanding air travel — the same thing pointed out in most recent studies of the local airport.

Mayor Screen said he won't be expending the effort to locate a new airport site because at this time it is politically infeasible. As an alternative, he has committed the parish's resources to the existing facility at Metro.

"From an aviation system perspective, Baton Rouge Metropolitan is clearly the region's commercial service and general aviation airport. The Metropolitan Airport is expected to remain the dominant commercial and general aviation facility in the area. Since airfield capacity will be exceeded in the 1990s, construction of one or more additional airports in the Baton Rouge area is recommended to accommodate unserved demands," the study says.

A deficit, "even with the construction of the proposed parallel runway, will become apparent in the early 1990s. There is no practicable way to serve the long-term regional demands at only one airport," it says.

Bobby Wilkinson of Wilkinson Real Estate in Port Allen said the proposed facility will likely offer little relief from the congested conditions at Ryan Field.

"I'm not at liberty to say too much because we're not far enough along," Wilkinson said.

He said the airstrip is part of plans for a commercial and industrial park on the West Bank. He would not reveal the planned location.

But a Federal Aviation Administration official reviewing plans said the airstrip would be between La. 76 and U.S. 190, about eight miles southwest of Metro Airport.

He said his office was studying to see if there would be any complications with its proximity to a navigational aid for Metro Airport.

"First we have to find out if there will be enough business in the park to justify the airstrip," Wilkinson said.

"It's really too early to tell," he said.

Wilkinson said the only way the facility will provide relief for Ryan is if the clientele of the park already has planes at Ryan and moves them to the industrial park's airstrip.

"There is no intention of being a relief for Ryan," he said.

"We've gone from the talking stages to the formulation of ideas," Wilkinson said.

He said the license was applied for as part of the planning phase because "we have to know in the beginning" as the park is being sold.

Efforts to relocate Metro Airport's commercial or general aviation facilities in West Baton Rouge Parish — as well as other surrounding parishes — have meet with strong opposition and failure.