

Atlantic City International Airport expansion on track for completion in May

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EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP — The 75,000-square-foot expansion of Atlantic City International Airport is on track for completion in May, South Jersey Transportation Authority officials said Thursday.

The \$25 million project at the Egg Harbor Township airport is adding a federal inspection station for international flights, three passenger boarding bridges and a larger baggage-claim area.

Officials at the SJTA, which runs the airport, are planning that the inspection station will add international flights when it opens, making the local airport more attractive to passengers who may now be using airports in Philadelphia and Newark.

The airport currently has no scheduled international service.

Workers continued construction at the site Thursday, building around the skeleton base of the new facility. The project's general contractor is Hunter Roberts Construction Group of Philadelphia. Work started in December 2010.

"This gives the region and Atlantic City a whole other option. That's what people want. They don't want to be bused from another airport. They want to get here, get in the cab, the shuttle or limo," said Bart Mueller, executive director of the SJTA.

Mueller said there are no international destinations lined up yet.

Mueller and other officials on Thursday led Grace Hanlon, executive director of the New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism, on a tour of the construction site. Hanlon also greeted an arriving Spirit Airlines flight from Orlando by handing out state tourism brochures.

Spirit is the primary carrier out of Atlantic City International.

AirTran Airways, which was acquired by Southwest Airlines, announced earlier this year it was pulling out of the airport.

The loss of the carrier also means the loss of connectivity because Atlanta was a hub for many national flights.

Mueller said the loss does have a bright side: Because the route existed for two years, airport officials have data on flight figures from that time. Before the route, there was no guideline on passengers.

Atlantic City International, which was coming off a record year in 2010 that saw 1.4 million total passengers, is off from last year's pace.

Through October, there were fewer than 1.2 million total passengers, a decline of 1.1 percent from the same period in 2010, according to SJTA figures.

The airport had to deal with some setbacks this year, including Spirit Airline's decision to make a previously year-round Atlantic City to Boston route a seasonal one, as well as the cancellation of 44 flights in August due to Hurricane Irene.

Meanwhile, Margate-based charter service Gold Transportation will begin offering its Florida Flights weekly winter flights between the local airport and Fort Lauderdale, Fla., starting in January and running through April. The company had previously run the seasonal route but stopped in 1993.

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