

\$4.2 million design contract approved for Atlantic City Expressway-airport connector

By BRIAN IANIERI Staff Writer pressofAtlanticCity.com / Tuesday, November 15, 2011 8:41 pm

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The planned direct connection roadway between the Atlantic City Expressway and the local airport is sufficiently complicated that the contract for its final design is worth \$4.2 million.

The proposed connection would consist of a series of roads and bridges to funnel expressway vehicles to Atlantic City International Airport and the NextGen Aviation Research & Technology Park while avoiding local traffic and the circle at the intersection of Delilah and Tilton roads in Egg Harbor Township.

The project is expected to cost between \$40 million and \$50 million, said Sam Donelson, deputy executive director of the South Jersey Transportation Authority, which runs the airport and the expressway.

On Tuesday morning, SJTA commissioners approved a contract with engineering and construction firm Parsons Brinckerhoff, of Lawrenceville, Mercer County, to draft the final design for the connector.

The design will take 10 to 12 months to complete, which will then allow the transportation authority to advertise for bids on its construction, Donelson said.

The proposal still needs state and federal environmental approvals, including approval from the Federal Aviation Administration, he said.

The plan has also created concern from residents in the nearby Steeple Chase Village mobile home community, where about five mobile homes would be displaced under a plan presented to residents in June.

The SJTA sees the direct connector road as an important link designed to handle expected growth at the research park and passenger volumes at the airport, Donelson said.

"That traffic you deal with — especially at rush hour, which is when most of our flights are leaving — can become quite unbearable," he said.

Meanwhile, total passenger counts at the airport were down 1.5 percent through October compared to the same period last year, figures provided by the SJTA show.

There were nearly 1.2 million passengers who flew into or out of the local airport through both scheduled and charter flights from January to October.

The authority attributed the decrease to Spirit Airlines, which reduced the number of flights to Florida in September and October while the Miramar, Fla.-based, airline replaced its fleet with planes with more seating capacity.

Spirit replaced its A319 aircraft, which had 145-seat capacities, with A320s and A321s, which have capacities of 178 seats and 218 seats, a Spirit spokeswoman said in September.

In 2010, Atlantic City International Airport saw about 1.4 million passengers, the most since commercial service started there in 1985. The airport is also in the midst of 75,000-square-foot expansion that includes a federal inspection station for processing international flights.

At the same time, the airport has met with some setbacks, including the announced loss of AirTran Airways, which flies into the Atlanta hub.

AirTran was acquired by Southwest Airlines this year and announced it would leave the airport by January 2012.

The announcement came shortly before an agreement expired under which the SJTA subsidized Atlanta flights that did not generate enough passenger revenues.

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