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Panama City airport aims for 'aerotropolis'

Officials hire an expert to lure international carriers, development

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PANAMA CITY — Panama City-Bay County International Airport officials want the \$330 million facility to be an

"aerotropolis" that draws international flights and business to West Bay.

To meet that goal, airport leaders are talking to several international carriers and have hired John Kasarda, a

scholar and author who coined the term "aerotropolis."

Randy Curtis, the airport's executive director, said airport officials are talking with several airlines in Canada and England. He declined to name the airlines.

Bill Cramer, the vice chairman of the Airport Authority, confirmed the discussions but also declined to name

the carriers.

"They're not willing to go on the record," Cramer said of the airlines.

However, he said Kasarda will be instrumental in bringing in those international flights and other businesses.

"I don't think it's out of reach," Cramer said.

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The area's port, rail system and road improvements will attract carriers that don't service the existing airport, he added.

"We're strategically placed to be a player in the international freight business," Cramer said. "It's not just about passenger traffic. That's a big part of it, obviously. But it's about maximizing economic benefits of this new airport."

Earlier this week, the authority agreed to pay a \$5,000 monthly retainer and all travel expenses for Kasarda. Under the terms of the one-year deal, Kasarda will work up to 16 days and make presentations to the media and public.

The presentations will show that "the new Panama

City-Bay County International Airport and the surrounding area represent the best way forward for Northwest Florida, both economically and environmentally," according to information provided by the authority.

Kasarda will collect \$2,900 a day for any days worked over 16 each month.

He also will promote and market the new airport in conference presentations around the world and in airport-related publications. Kasarda also will "synergize the new airport with surrounding development to increase air passenger and cargo," "create a new airport-centric destination model" and "improve the Panama City airport experi-

ence of its air passengers."

According to his resume, Kasarda has done consulting work for airports in Memphis, Tenn., Washington, D.C., Kansas City and Detroit, as well as in Brazil and India. In 2005, he was tapped to advise the federal Government Accountability Office on costs of adapting U.S. airport infrastructure and facilities to meet the needs of the Airbus A380.

Kasarda was out of the country Thursday and could not be reached for comment.

Kasarda is "the pre-eminent expert on economic development around airports," Cramer said. "He's most noted ... for his development of the concept of the

aerotropolis."

On his Web site, Kasarda describes the aerotropolis as an engine for economic development that attracts aviation-linked businesses, including hotel, entertainment, retail and corporate headquarters.

An aerotropolis stretches for 20 miles from the airport and will be similar to a traditional metropolis, Kasarda wrote.

"Although most aerotropolis development to date has been spontaneous and haphazard — spawning congestion and environmental problems — in the future it can be markedly improved through strategic infrastructure and urban planning," Kasarda wrote.