

# Kansas' Brownback wants a new Kansas City airport

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While Santa Monica, California, government officials are doing everything they can to close down their airport, Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback is apparently doing everything he can to build an entirely new airport south of Kansas City, Kansas.

Kansas City's existing airport, Kansas City International Airport, has been under scrutiny for years as officials have tried to determine what can be done to update the airport to modern standards. Discussion regarding the effort stalled last year when polls indicated that Kansas City residents were happy with the airport as it is.

The current airport has three terminals, which most users seem to favor because they see it as easier to get in and out than a single terminal design. When that became evident, city officials abandoned the idea of a major renovation of the existing airport.

Kansas City Mayor Sly James and its city manager were both in favor of renovating the airport, but Brownback sees a modern new airport as a greater economic opportunity in his effort to win back businesses and jobs from the state of Missouri and the Missouri side of Kansas City.

Mayor James said, "If we don't get off our tails, the possibility becomes greater" that a new airport would be built that Kansas City International would have difficulty competing with. The governor is not looking for the new airport to replace Kansas City International, but to be an entirely new airport that would co-exist with KCI.

According to the governor, "Airlines are requesting construction of a new single terminal airport at (KCI) and the state of Kansas is continually looking for new economic development opportunities."

Southwest Airlines reportedly had become interested in a new single-terminal airport, and "suggested that they would help finance it." Brownback sees the new airport as an economic stimulus for the airport, in addition to the provision of airline traffic. One report stated that "Kansas City says nearly 60,800 people owe their jobs to KCI" – so the new airport would create many new jobs in the same way.

At least one Kansas City Council member is skeptical about the viability of a new airport of the scale as Brownback is proposing.

He was quoted in the Kansas City Star to have said, "I just think in this day and age, you would have so many obstacles that it would be hard to put something together that the federal government would agree to and you could get financing on. At the same time, stranger things

have happened, and that's why I think this should be a wake-up call to those of us who want to keep aviation services in Kansas City."

He may be right, since part of President Trump's campaign was that America needs to modernize its airports.

President Trump met with several domestic airline executives last week. The Kansas City Star article quoted Kevin Burke, the "president and CEO of Airports Council International North America, a trade association of airport directors" who said that "during the meeting (with President Trump) the president stated four times that America must modernize and rebuild our airports. We can quickly fund and undertake these much-needed infrastructure projects with no federal budget impact by giving airports more control of local investment decisions."

Although the exact location of the new airport has not been announced, it has been released that it would likely be in Johnson County, which is south of Kansas City and about 35 miles from KCI. KCI is located at the northernmost outskirts of Kansas City on the Kansas side of the border.

KCI is the largest airport in the region, with a number of smaller general aviation airports in all directions within a 35-mile radius.

One that has drawn some speculation as a possible location for the new airport is Johnson County Executive airport at Olathe. It is a small, having only one 4,100-foot-long runway, but traffic there is controlled by a air traffic controller in a control tower.

The key for the new location will depend upon the ability to locate a tract of land large enough for multiple runways of sufficient length for domestic air carriers. Highway access and utilities will also be critical to the planning of the new airport.

Skeptics believe that even if this airport becomes a reality it is many years away. They might be right if we maintain the status quo with the same regulations that have turned other airports into 25- or 30-year projects.

But if Trump succeeds in curtailing even some of those regulations, big dreams like this one might not take so long.



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