

# Airport construction jets money into local economy

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Statistics released May 25 by the Columbus Regional Airport Authority show the city's three airport facilities have become major contributors to the local economy.

Elaine Roberts, airport authority president and CEO, said Port Columbus International Airport, Rickenbacker Airport and Bolton Field facilities are responsible for more than \$2.7 billion a year in economic activity.

The airport authority has a construction budget of more than \$117 million this year for improvement and expansion projects, with more than \$490 million in capital expenditures occurring since 2005.

These projects are funded by federal airport improvement grants, federal American Recovery & Reinvestment Act funding, airport revenue bonds, user fees and airport authority funds.

"In addition to the significant, ongoing economic impact created by the airports, several major, multi-year construction projects are fueling even greater economic growth in the region," Roberts said.

The first major project is the replacement of the south runway at Port Columbus. The replacement runway, which will be 702 feet south of the existing south runway, maximizes the use of airport property by providing enough separation from the north runway for simultaneous arrivals and departures, Roberts said. The new location also sets the stage for a second passenger terminal, which will be built in the center of the airport property, as dictated by increased passenger activity. The existing south runway, which includes original 1928 pavement in some areas, has been extended and repaved over the years and with this new project will be converted to a taxiway.

The airport authority's board of directors has approved more than \$45 million in runway-replacement project funds. The majority of those funds will go to Shelly & Sands Inc. for paving and electrical work, as well as the installation of aircraft navigational

aids, Roberts said. The entire four-year project, which includes modifications to the airport golf course, is estimated about \$143 million. Earth and utility work is under way, with the runway expected to open June 2013.

The board also approved more than \$4.2 million in funds for the final phase of pavement rehabilitation and lighting replacement for a runway at Rickenbacker, the cargo-dedicated airport on the south side of Columbus, Roberts said. After its completion, the project will have spanned three years and resulted in an investment of about \$15.3 million.

Another major construction project currently under way at Port Columbus is the new in-line baggage-screening system that is expected to enhance safety and customer service, Roberts said. Terminal-lobby congestion will be alleviated when the screening equipment is moved behind the scenes, enabling passengers to again leave their luggage at the airline ticket counters, he said. This \$34-million project started in 2010 and is expected to be functional by Thanksgiving, with some work continuing into 2012.

"We recognize that our business and community partners rely on the successful operation and development of Port Columbus, Rickenbacker and Bolton Field airports," Roberts said. "We take great pride in providing safe, enjoyable airport environments on a daily basis while also planning for the long-term growth of these critical aviation assets. We are fortunate to be able to accomplish this while also creating a significant impact to the local economy."