
Study: Airports need cash to meet demand

\$9.8B infusion necessary over 20 years to meet future needs

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PHOENIX (AP) — Arizona's 83 public-use airports will need a \$9.7 billion infusion over the next 20 years to meet future demand, according to a study conducted for the Arizona Department of Transportation.

The airports need at least \$486 million in local, state, federal or private funding for each of the next two decades for a variety of issues ranging from security and flight safety to growth-related problems such as infrastructure, expansion and urban encroachment, according to the study.

Included in the funding is \$2.45 billion to address goals of the State Airports System Plan, which involve accessibility, meeting environmental obligations and accommodating anticipated population and economic growth.

The plan calls for more than \$7 billion in projects for commercial and general-aviation airports, including projects such as Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport's people-mover train and the expansion of Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport's passenger terminal.

Jeff Tripp, the president of the Arizona Airports Association, said meeting the study recommendations would depend on the economy and airports' ability to generate revenue.

Deborah Ostreicher, a spokeswoman for Phoenix Sky Harbor, said the airport will continue to meet demand on critical safety and security operations with funds currently generated by the airport. However, nonessential projects will have to wait.

Funding is getting hard to come by. In recent years, Arizona lawmakers have diverted nearly \$100 million in aviation funds to non-aviation uses.

The study describes the loss as "one of the most critical policy issues facing airports," saying it has "negatively impacted the ability of Arizona's airports to meet development needs (and) make safety improvements."

Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport director Lynn Kusy said the amount of aviation funds swept by lawmakers in recent years represents more than the state received for airport projects through the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

Arizona transportation spokeswoman Laura Douglas said the agency has had to put off paying for projects that had been previously funded.

"Because of legislative sweeps, these payments have been deferred over the last 15 months," she said, adding that ADOT has about 225 outstanding airport-development grants around the state that have had their funding delayed.