

Airport groundbreaking marks upgrade start

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Last month, San Diego County Regional Airport Authority and local government representatives unveiled transportation designs that connect California's major cities, regional airports and mass transit hubs via high-speed rail and organized flight as the vision San Diego planners have for San Diego International Airport at Lindbergh Field. The next step is at hand, as officials broke ground on some of those projects on Wednesday, July 8.

The projects include 10 additional gates at Terminal 2 and a dual-level, curbside passenger way. The cost to these and other modifications is expected to be \$600 million.

A panel of government leaders and spokespersons presented the concepts during the June 3 forum, hosted by the Peninsula Community Planning Board at the Corky McMillin Cos. Event Center at Liberty Station. Included in the group was Councilmember Kevin Faulconer, whose District 2 includes Downtown.

One proposed concept included connecting the San Francisco Bay area to the San Diego region via a high-speed rail that would travel beneath Downtown through Lindbergh Field to Gen. A.L. Rodriguez International Airport in Tijuana, Mexico.

California High Speed Rail Authority representative Mike Zdon added that connecting the cities and airports could become a reality as municipalities and the federal government work hand in hand with private companies. A \$40 billion project like that could be done in less than a decade, said Zdon.

"There's a good chance that California could lead the way with high-speed rail," Zdon said.

Audience questions over a second runway, a second airport and long-term improvements peppered the discussion.

"This is the only airport we have, so let's make it the best it can be, because it's going to be there for a very long time," said Keith Wilschetz, San Diego County Regional Airport Authority representative and director of airport planning.

Bruce Boland, a retired rear admiral and now an Airport Authority representative, said the community shouldn't worry about a second runway at Lindbergh Field because it would be difficult to get that "by" the Peninsula community politically. He added the Airport Authority is not looking at plans to build a second airport just yet because of a mandate from current state legislation to have the region's existing airports to first work together more efficiently.

Senate Bill 10, authored by state Sen. Christine Kehoe, took effect this year. The bill reworks the makeup of the Airport Authority's board of directors and cuts some executive committee members' pay.

It also directs the authority to plan ahead for the region's airport network that links 16 airports throughout the county, according to airport authority officials.

Though Boland said the Airport Authority isn't looking for another airport location, many who attended said the authority should look at long-term alternatives.