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# New terminal proposed for Des Moines airport

Plan calls for \$468 million replacement on south side of complex

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Written by **Joel Aschbrenner**

A new \$468 million terminal — potentially the costliest public building project in state history — is the centerpiece of a proposal released Tuesday to overhaul the Des Moines International Airport.

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The proposal calls for building a new terminal on the south side of

the airport off Army Post Road. If approved, construction could begin in 2022 and wrap up in 2024.

Airport officials have long called for a new facility, saying the 65-year-old terminal is obsolete. During peak boarding times, lines for women's restrooms stretch down the concourse, passengers overflow waiting areas, and the gates are too close together to accommodate large jets, said airport executive director Kevin Foley.

### Proposed airport overhaul

A study released Tuesday provides a blueprint for developing a new \$468 million terminal at the Des Moines International Airport. The current terminal would be demolished and turned into an area for cargo aircraft. The airport authority board is expected to vote on the proposal in May.



Source: Des Moines International Airport

### How project stacks up

A proposed terminal at the Des Moines International Airport is expected to cost \$468 million in today's dollars, or nearly \$540 million when construction would begin.

Scott Norvell, president and CEO of Master Builders of Iowa, said to his knowledge it would be the most expensive public building project in Iowa. A few other projects for comparison:

- Wells Fargo Arena and the surrounding complex, \$217 million when finished in 2005.
- Reconstruction of Hancher Auditorium on the University of Iowa campus, damaged during the 2008 flood, \$176 million.

"We can't do nothing," he said. "Pragmatically, we will reach a point when our passengers can't reach the airplane."

The proposal, developed by the aviation consulting group Leigh Fisher, is the culmination of a seven-month study of airport facilities. A more extensive version of the report will be presented in April to the Airport Authority Board, which is expected to vote on the proposal in May.

Business leaders in the metro area welcomed the plan for a new terminal.

"A modern airport is really important to keeping the airlines invested and serving our city," said Tom Mahoney, president and CEO of the ITA Group, a West Des Moines firm that coordinates business travel for corporate clients.

Greg Edwards, president and CEO of the Greater Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau, said people traveling to Des Moines often say the airport is convenient but feels outdated and like that of a small town.

"We need to make it feel more like a big-city airport," Edwards said.

Not all, though, are convinced Des Moines

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needs a new terminal.

Kevin Cosgrove, who lives in the Chicago area and flies into Des Moines regularly for his consulting business, said he never would have guessed the terminal is 65 years old.

“I travel quite a bit, and there are several other terminals I’m in frequently that are in much worse shape than this one,” he said Tuesday.

### **Airport passengers reach record levels**

Plans for a new terminal come as the airport has welcomed record numbers of passengers. More than 2.2 million travelers passed through the airport in 2013, a 6 percent increase from 2012.

The study said all terminal facilities will be inadequate when passenger numbers reach 3 million, which would happen in 2027 if ridership grows by 2.4 percent a year.

The current terminal has 11 gates and cannot be expanded because it abuts runways. Under the proposal, the new terminal would have 14 gates, with plans for expansion to 18, and the potential for later expansions.

“This is a plan that would set up the airport for a very successful long-term future,” said Tom Schnetzer, a director with Leigh Fisher.

Scott Norvell, president and CEO of the Master Builders of Iowa, said the nearly half-billion-dollar terminal would be the largest publicly funded building project in Iowa, and its construction would likely employ more than a thousand people.

“It’s a huge project, and it would be great for Iowa and the city of Des Moines if it does get built,” he said. “I hope it happens.”

### **Securing funding seen as challenge**

Securing funding for a new terminal will be a challenge Schnetzer said. Under one plan, about 52 percent of funding would come from grants, including federal airport improvement funds, while the rest would come from bonds, city funds and private partnerships. Some airports, like many sports stadiums, have sold naming rights,

Schnetzer said.

Some costs could be passed to passengers. The per-passenger fee the airport charges airlines would increase about 50 percent, from \$8.90 to \$13.50, not factoring inflation, the study said.

A 2007 study called for a \$578 million overhaul including a terminal, but the recession derailed the plans.

The site identified for a new terminal currently houses cargo aircraft. Cargo operations now require less space than once predicted because UPS and other companies have turned their focus to ground shipping, Foley said. Cargo operations would be moved to the site of the current terminal, he said.

The existing terminal would be demolished. The adjacent parking garage would remain, with a shuttle to the new terminal.

The study did not directly address the future of the Air National Guard at the airport. The Guard's F-16 fighter jets have moved to other bases, and flight operations are scheduled to end in September. Airport officials expect part of the Guard's 172-acre parcel to be given back to the airport and redeveloped into hangars for corporate aircraft.

Airport officials said the Leigh Fisher study does not provide a design for the new terminal, but instead outlines a plan for relocating airport facilities and how to fund them.

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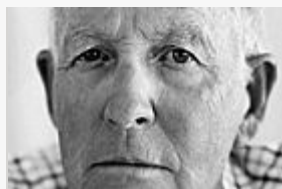
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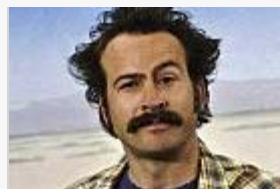
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