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From the Triangle Business Journal:

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How \$11M in airport improvements could fuel interest at a business park in Louisburg

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Airport improvements are paying off in Franklin County, where economic developers say they are fielding serious interest when it comes to an adjacent business park. And nearly \$11 million in planned airport improvements could further accelerate economic interest.

Sources say at least one aircraft parts manufacturer has seriously inquired about the Triangle North Franklin industrial park, just across the street from Triangle North Executive Airport in Louisburg.



TRIANGLE NORTH EXECUTIVE AIRPORT

In an effort to be more competitive in eastern North Carolina, airport officials intend to use the money to lengthen and strengthen the runway. The airport has grown to house 125 aircraft from 80 just six years ago.

As the airport grows, so will the surrounding community's economic development prospects, says Richie Duncan, economic development director of Franklin County. She declined to identify companies that have expressed interest in Triangle North Franklin, citing confidentiality concerns, but did say the airport was a driver in conversations.

"I can say that [aircraft parts manufacturing] would be one of the industries that we would target," she says. "We're obviously seeking businesses that are aviation-related ... and we're also seeking those businesses where it would be advantageous to have a corporate jet."

And \$1.8 million in recent grants from the Rural Infrastructure Authority to build sewer infrastructure at Triangle North Franklin is another factor that makes the park ideal for development.

On any given year, up to 50,000 planes take off from the airport, located just across the street from the business park.

An incoming \$11 million cash infusion, however, coupled with a highway project destined to make the airfield “minutes closer to Raleigh,” could lure even more activity, says Steve Merritt, airport manager. Even without companies setting up shop at Triangle Park North, he says the airport could easily double its capacity in the coming years if it had a blank check, citing “daily” inquiries about hangar space.

The rolling hills in Franklin County create construction challenges, making the NCDOT cash infusion vital in lengthening and strengthening the runway, he says. The anticipated NCDOT grant will lengthen the runway from 5,500 to 6,500 feet long, making it more competitive with nearby airfields in Sanford and Smithfield. The added thickness will allow it to bear about 90,000 pounds of weight, which could accommodate mid-sized freight aircraft.

The airport is at capacity – a similar situation to other nearby airfields. It currently houses one corporate jet, which belongs to Youngsville-based CaptiveAire.

Read: Another small airport expected to bring big business to N.C.

While Merritt says the airport could hold nine more corporate jets, it needs more hangars to grow significantly. That’s why some of the NCDOT funding will go toward straightening an access road – a move he says allows more room for future hangars.

The airport improvements are just one of the projects anticipated to be included in the state’s next 10-year transportation plan; a draft will be released in January. The plan includes the years 2018 through 2027.

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