

## **Voice of The Southern: Airport development will aid entire region**

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Our View: Growth at Southern Illinois Airport is a great economic development opportunity, but it needs widespread support to reach its full potential.

It was not too surprising for Gov. Pat Quinn to visit our region for a Monday afternoon progress briefing about the Transportation Education Center that will be built for Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Quinn hopes to be elected governor in November, and there is nothing unwise about making public appearances and talking to the news media about big-money projects that create jobs and offer hope for better days ahead. Especially when you're trailing in the polls, as the Democrat Quinn is trailing Republican state Sen. Bill Brady.

But aside from the obvious campaign value of being associated with growth and economic development, especially in our hard-pressed region, Quinn expressed an absolute truth about the opportunity being presented to our region.

Quinn appropriately described the tax-saving benefits from the use of renewable energy and green concepts in the TEC project. Then he hammered home the major take-away from TEC - the project will spread across the economy and help create hundreds of jobs in Southern Illinois.

It is an opportunity of special value to nearby Murphysboro and Carbondale, through the construction jobs and future potential of TEC, the new home of SIUC's nationally known automotive and aviation programs.

First will come the construction jobs, which don't last forever, followed by the longtime jobs housed by TEC, which Quinn's office described as a \$43.5 million project. Three buildings will be erected at Southern Illinois Airport for TEC - an education building that will house classrooms, offices, labs, flight simulators, weather dispatch, a multipurpose center and chassis test cells where airplane engines will be tested.

It's an exciting project by itself, but it's not the only opportunity taking shape at SI Airport. Construction is well underway on a state-of-the-art \$11.4 million Carbondale Armed Forces Reserve Center. The 58,353 square foot building is scheduled to be completed by February 2011. The buildings will house operations for two Illinois Army National Guard units and one Army Reserve unit and create nearly 20 full-time jobs. Also planned for the airport is a \$4 million public safety building.

Here's why you should care. All of the students, employees, reservists, guardsmen, armory workers, public safety employees and visitors will be spending a lot of time near the airport and traveling New Era Road and other routes to the airfield. They will need places to eat, buy gas for their vehicles and shop. A support community is likely to develop. Some new housing is likely to be built closer to the new jobs and facilities. Spin-off developments in the aviation and automotive fields seem a near-certainty; high-tech startups love university partnerships.

Sounds great, doesn't it? But these things won't happen magically. It will take people. It will take a vision of what might be. An economic development corridor near the airport needs support and encouragement from the chambers of commerce in Carbondale and Murphysboro. It very well might be adopted as a signature cause, an issue to champion, for the Jackson Growth Alliance. We certainly make that recommendation.

This is an important opportunity for all of Southern Illinois, and another litmus test for the "one region/one vision" teamwork long touted by this newspaper. It needs the support of leadership and taxpayers across the region because, even if it doesn't attract quite as many headlines and hoopla as the Marion destination development, there is no question "the sky is the limit" for the growing airport community.

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