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San Marcos takes to the air

City wants to invest significantly in airport, surrounding area

Austin Business Journal - by [Kate Harrington](#) ABJ Staff

Nestled about 10 miles east of I-35, the San Marcos Municipal Airport is once again gaining attention from city leaders wanting to make it the crown jewel of future economic growth for the area.

With more than 700 developable acres and several million dollars in renovations planned, city officials are asking Congress for about \$8 million to go into the Texas Department of Transportation's aviation trust fund for a three-staged project at the airport.

The San Marcos Municipal Airport is rooted in the area's history -- during World War II and the Korean War it was a training site for Air Force pilots -- and, in turn, efforts to bolster the airport's growth have consistently been a theme in San Marcos in recent years.

Those efforts could start to pay off this summer if Congress approves the \$8 million request for funding.

The project, according to Winstead PC's and San Marcos Washington lobbyist Bill LaForge, would include:

- Developing a land plan for raw land that fronts State Highway 21 on the airport's north side and making infrastructure improvements there with hopes of luring industrial users.
- A new 10,000-square-foot terminal that would include modern amenities such as restaurant space.
- A new fixed base of operation that would provide basic airplane services, such as a fueling station.

A new air traffic control tower, the airport's first new tower built since World War II, is now in the design stages, says Linda Howard, director of planning and programming for TxDOT's aviation division.

Chuck Nash, chairman of the San Marcos Airport Commission, says much of the raw land at the airport has frontage on SH 21 and is near State Highway 130, so it's prime for development as the city grows to the east.

"The SH 21 and U.S. Highway 183 intersection, that's going to be a major feed-off that will take you from Austin-Bergstrom [airport] to State Highway 45," he says. "We've been so focused on I-35, but the land there is so expensive. We have all this land, that if the city chooses to, we could make it available to the right company."

Nash says the city has hired a land planner to recommend a growth plan.

At the same time, the airport is already seeing a growth in general aviation demand, and Nash says

the north-side redevelopment will likely include new hangar space. Roughly 200 airplanes use the airport now. Nash says pilots from San Antonio and Austin increasingly use San Marcos' airport because its rent and fuel costs are lower.

The San Marcos airport is currently home to 10 businesses, including San Marcos-based Berry Aviation, which employs about 100 and is one of the airport's top users.

Jerry Heare, a principal and senior real estate broker with NAI Austin, says San Marcos' airport could be a good draw for industrial development in the future, but may have to wait until existing space in Austin and San Antonio is taken up. But, he says, with good runways and clearance, room to grow and its position in the middle of the Central Texas corridor, the San Marcos airport could be in a position to start attracting smaller commercial carriers as well as businesses once it makes some of its planned improvements.

"An airport is one of the jewels you put in your industrial toolkit that you have and someone else doesn't," Heare says of attracting industrial development. "And San Marcos has probably the finest airport for a smaller town in Central Texas. Only Austin and San Antonio have airports that are larger."

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