



News

**PANAMA CITY AIRPORT CONSTRUCTION
PROJECT TWO MONTHS AHEAD OF SCHEDULE**

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Panama City, Florida's greenfield airport construction project is two months ahead of schedule, thanks to the contractor's decision to move to a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week work schedule, an airport authority executive said.

High fuel prices prompted the contractor to add a night shift and switch from a traditional 40-hour work week to a 24-7 work week, said Randy Curtis, executive director of the Panama City-Bay County International Airport Authority. The contractor expects to use 3.5 million gallons of fuel over the course of the construction project, and the company is betting that the price of fuel will go up. So it is hedging its future fuel costs by changing its work schedule. "The longer [the construction project] drags out, the higher the cost of fuel will be," Curtis explained. A secondary benefit is that the construction project is two months ahead of schedule, he said.

The entire 1,300 acres that the airport initially will occupy have been cleared and the area for the terminal building and general aviation facilities have been graded, Curtis said. Work on the four-lane access road is under way, and when complete it will be used by the contractor to bring in heavy equipment. Paving was set to begin last week, and the road should be finished within about one month.

Ten companies have submitted bids for the terminal building and public safety building (police and fire facility) construction projects, Curtis said. Bids are due by Aug. 15.

The airport authority board will meet July 15 to decide if the runway will be built from concrete or asphalt, Curtis said. Runway construction is to begin by mid-October.

Also on the agenda for the July 15 meeting is whether to build out the terminal space allotted for customs and immigration or leave the space empty for future construction, Curtis said.

The authority also is accepting proposals for the environmental mitigation work on 10,000 acres south of the airport, Curtis said. "The goal is to try to return the land to its condition before any development in the area," he said. This involves removing logging roads built during the site's previous use by **the St. Joe Company** and eradicating non-native plant species.

The greenfield airport is being built on a 4,000-acre parcel of land donated by **the St. Joe Company**, part of a 41,000-acre tract the company is developing. The existing airport, hemmed in by a body of water and residential and commercial development, will be decommissioned and redeveloped when the new airport comes online, which is expected in May 2010.

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