The Youngstown-Warren Regional Airport: Plans and Prospects Reid Dulberger

For more than three thousand years, transportation has been directly linked to urban development. From natural waterways, harbors and overland trade routes, to man-made canals, railroad and highways, direct access to efficient transportation systems have defined which urban areas thrived, and which did not. Today, the Youngstown-Warren metropolitan area is looking to capitalize on air transport to help spur metropolitan revitalization.

The Youngstown-Warren Metropolitan Area is comprised of Columbiana, Mahoning and Trumbull Counties. Once the nation's fourth largest iron and steel producing region, the "Mahoning Valley" suffered the estimated loss of some 40,000 jobs between 1979 and 1982, as four large steel mills closed, and many other related industries were forced to cut back. Since 1982 the economy has slowly recovered, so that today there are more jobs in the Valley than ever before. Most of this growth, however, has been in the service and retail sectors, resulting in lower average wages and significantly less wealth in the community.

The older cities bordering the former steel corridor of the Mahoning River are experiencing high unemployment rates, and the community continues to look for ways to achieve consistently higher growth rates.

Modeled on developments in Fort Worth, Texas, Columbus, Ohio, and other places, plans are underway to convert the Youngstown-Warren Regional Airport into a cargo airpark, integrating air and highway transportation with a modern industrial park, foreign trade zone and other incentive and assistance programs. The intent is to create a low transportation cost opportunity for companies in manufacturing and distribution, particularly those engaged in international trade. The Alliance Project in Texas and Rickenbacker International Airport in Columbus, have shown that freight and industrial airports can attract thousands of new jobs—as companies looking to site new facilities in those markets have chosen airport locations, as opposed to other sites in other communities. A recent poll of the 150 largest manufacturing and distribution firms within a 30-mile radius of the Youngstown-Warren Airport found 60% of the respondents expected the project to lower their transportation costs, and 46% expected to realize increased sales.

Having received a commitment of \$32 million from the Federal Aviation Administration to improve the Airport itself, community leaders are now working to raise \$25.6 million to fund road, water and sewer improvements for the area around the Airport, and the development of an initial 500 acre industrial park. When completed the project is conservatively expected to attract some 5,000 net new jobs, generating \$90 million in new payroll, 8.7 million square feet of new facility construction, valued at \$340 million.