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Is airport hub in Arlington's future?

Business travelers are shifting to using smaller airports on the East Coast, and officials want to determine if the model would work here.

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ARLINGTON -- The question of whether the Arlington Airport could become a hub for business travelers may be answered in part with help from the federal government.

The airport expects soon to receive \$150,000 in federal funds for planning its future. Part of that planning is determining whether an East Coast trend toward businesspeople using smaller airports could catch on here, Arlington Airport director Rob Putnam said.

The money is part of a federal \$3.5 billion airport funding package approved last year and now set to be released to local governments, said Matt McAlvanah, a spokesman for U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash.

The Anacortes Airport also has been awarded \$1 million from the same package for construction projects and new equipment, according to U.S. Rep. Rick Larsen, D-Wash.

Murray requested the funding for the two airports, said Alex Glass, a spokeswoman for the senator. Murray is chairwoman of the Senate Transportation and Housing Appropriations Subcommittee.

A big question facing Arlington is how much hangar space the airport will need, Putnam said. It's going to need more, but how much more will depend partly on whether the trend toward business travelers flying small jets on short flights catches on here, he said.

Despite rising fuel prices, Putnam believes it's inevitable. Flying between local airports -- such as Arlington and Sea-Tac, or Paine Field and Sea-Tac -- could save time, he said.

"I think businesspeople are really going to take advantage of this," Putnam said.

Florida's smaller airports are bustling as the trend has caught on there, Putnam said.

"It seems to be expanding out to other states," he said.

Also, if more corporate jets begin using Paine Field or Boeing Field, it could cause a rise in other, smaller planes using Arlington Airport, he said.

The city does a study to update its plans every six or seven years, Putnam said. The last two were done in 1995 and 2001, and each time the airport got similar help from the federal government.

The city of Arlington, which runs the airport, plans to hire Barnard Dunkelberg, a national airport consultant based in Oklahoma, to do the study.

The cost of the study is currently pegged at around \$205,000, he said. The city could ask the federal government for more help or cut back the work on the study, Putnam said.

The airport has already received a grant of \$1.2 million for construction projects, he said. These involve repaving two existing taxiways, rebuilding another and building new airplane warmup areas separate from taxiways, Putnam said.

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