

Airport project will enhance region

From the very top of government to local political candidates, from business leaders to union leaders, from protestors to professors, everyone is searching for direction, changing solutions to bolster our economy.

What if we already had a regional solution ready to be implemented? What if Philadelphia and its surrounding counties could look to a single project capable of pumping millions into our economy, attracting more international and domestic travelers, creating more than 100,000 good jobs and calibrating the region for global economic growth?

Fact is, that project exists. Philadelphia International Airport's Capacity Enhancement Program (CEP) will improve quality of service, reduce delays, and increase the capacity to handle growing numbers of international and domestic flights. When completed, we will have an airport complex poised to answer the growing demand to move people and goods safely and more efficiently worldwide.

Quite frankly, our region will become even more attractive to business and leisure travelers alike once we have an improved airport. International and domestic travelers play an increasingly critical role in our region's economy and we need to make sure they continue coming here.

So much has been done already to sharpen Philadelphia's competitive edge. Capital investments in conjunction with intensive marketing efforts have made a tangible economic difference. The numbers tell the story: Tourism generates \$24 million a day in economic impact for our region, including millions in critically needed tax dollars. The money spent by business and leisure visitors at hotels, shops, restaurants and attractions create and sustain jobs and regional business growth. Increasing the number of international and domestic travelers will only enhance those numbers.

This is not the time to stand pat. To draw global visitors requires investment in our airport. We must improve our ability to welcome more visitors.

As with most major projects, there will be challenges along the way. At the time, getting the original Pennsylvania Convention Center approved and built was a compli-



Guest Notebook

Meryl Levitz and
Jack Ferguson

cated endeavor. More recently its expansion, which required acquiring an entire city block, produced a magnificent and adaptable structure that meets contemporary convention demands. And we all know the struggle it has taken to bring the Barnes to the Parkway – and won't it be worth the effort when it opens next year!

We believe the CEP is worth it, too. The direct and indirect economic impact of this project is stunning – especially in the context of a job- and growth-constrained economy. Expansion will create 100,000 jobs and an overall economic impact of \$26.4 billion in 2025, a 4.4 percent average annual increase, according to economic analysis. That's bang for the buck.

The Airport's CEP will facilitate the region's capacity to be a world-class destination for visitors, a thriving home for international businesses, a competitive force in the global cargo market, and a continued support to the corporations and institutions that have invested and continue to invest in our region.

We applaud the airport's leadership and the city's administration and urge elected officials, business and union leaders, business and the public to continue to support this critically important project for our region. It's a long haul – the project is set to be finished in 2025.

We are confident the result will be sweet – Greater Philadelphia will be an international and national destination for decades to come.

MERYL LEVITZ is president and CEO of the Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation. JACK FERGUSON is president and CEO of the Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau. This column is the fourth installment of the Global Philadelphia Association (www.globalphiladelphia.com) series entitled "Philadelphia - The Once and Future International City."