

St. Louis Regional Airport to Issue Bonds to Help Pay for Parking Addition

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West Star Aviation, a global business headquartered in the East Alton airport, is building a new hangar, yet aircraft parking needs extended in order to accommodate West Star Aviation's business development. The extension parking will cost approximately \$3 million.

"Confidence is high that the Federal Aviation Administration will fund \$1 million; the remainder will be funded through a bond issuance," the airport's Director of Aviation David Miller said Friday to The Telegraph.

The St. Louis Regional Airport Authority Board of Commissioners approved seeking bond funding at an airport authority board meeting last December, attended by First Midstate investment banker Kevin Wills. Wills presented bond alternatives regarding capital improvements, such as ramp extension, should the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) deny the airport's funding request.

A public hearing took place in mid-January regarding bond issuance, which the airport board of commissioners subsequently approved.

Aircraft parking is the responsibility of the airport, which West Star will build with expectations that its new hangar's construction will be completed by spring. With the coming hangar, the company needs the additional infrastructure to support its growing multi-million dollar global business.

Months ago, the St. Louis Regional Airport Authority began pursuing federal monetary support for the board-approved ramp extension project. West Star Aviation put stakes in the ground for the hangar before Christmas.

"The existing (jet) parking doesn't extend to the new hangar," Miller explained. "We've had success in getting three congressmen to endorse the project."

Illinois congressmen John Shimkus, R-Collinsville; Rodney Davis, R-Taylorville; and, Mike Bost, R-Murphysboro, wrote a letter of support of federal funding for the airport's hangar projects to FAA Deputy Administrator Daniel K. Elwell, noting that West Star presently operates its 160,000-square-foot maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) facility, housed in an existing West Star hangar, at the airport. West Star also built a 40,000-square-foot paint hangar on land leased from the airport.

When West Star Aviation built its first MRO hangar in 2014, it also brought 150 immediate jobs and more than \$20 million in revenue.

The coming 47,300-square-foot structure will be the second hangar the company has built in the last three years to accommodate its expanding business that specializes in maintenance, repair and overhaul, mostly for corporate jets, but also for some privately-owned jets. But, the airport's ramp extension would service not only West Star, but all of the airport's aviation facilities and tenants.

The St. Louis Regional Airport Authority has been deliberately developing its 600-acre East Alton business park to help subsidize aviation facilities and to support future growth. West Star also has a growing Falcon Service Center, an extensive international client base, including recently added Egyptian government jets, and an airport land-lease agreement for more than 160,000 square feet. West Star Aviation's new hangar's 40,700-square-feet of aircraft space will handily house eight large corporate jets.

"West Star has been the most successful tenant. It has put the St. Louis Regional Airport on the global map," Miller noted. "The company has been good for the airport and the community around it."

A vendor for West Star, Dugan Tool, closed two older locations to open a new facility at St. Louis Regional Airport. Many of the airport business park's tenants have provided services to West Star for years, he said. Miller also noted that corporate representatives are required to stay with their company's aircraft, which also adds up for about 2,000 overnight hotel/lodging stays per year in the region.

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