

Transportation

It's time for development around Denver's airport to take off, region's officials say

The concept has been over a decade in the making.



A plane takes off near DIA.
KATHLEEN LAVINE, DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL



By [Analisa Romano](#) – Reporter, Denver Business Journal Jun 7, 2024

Much of the land surrounding Denver International Airport remains vacant, and that looks like an opportunity to officials with the region's local governments and the airport itself.

Thousands of acres are ready for business ventures that could bring the likes of advanced manufacturing, aerospace, agriculture, renewable energy and health care facilities to the area, they say.

After years of organizing through what they dubbed the Aerotropolis Regional Committee, the coalition of local government and airport officials debuted this week as one entity: the Colorado Aerotropolis.

"The time is now — we're open for business," said Emma Pinter, chair of the Adams County Board of Commissioners and member of the aerotropolis group.

Members include local governments of Adams County, Aurora, Brighton, Commerce City, Denver, Federal Heights and Thornton as well as DIA, which alone has 16,000 acres of land that can be used for non-aviation purposes, according to [previous](#) Denver Business Journal reporting.

Pinter said the debut of the Aerotropolis seeks to offer site selectors, developers and companies a one-stop shop that touts the area's benefits a location for new business.



Antelope play near DIA.
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The region's proximity to Interstates 25 and 70, rail lines that surround DIA and the airport itself, make it ripe for development, Pinter said.

She and Jenni Hall, Adams County's director of economic development, also note the area is also in a foreign trade zone, which offers streamlined taxing and customs benefits to businesses located there.

Pinter pointed to other successful developments, such as the Fitzsimons Innovation Community and the Gaylord Rockies Resort and Convention Center, as examples for what

participating localities hope to see in future years.

The "aerotropolis" concept for brand the land around DIA reaches [as far back as former Denver Mayor Michael Hancock's election](#) in 2011. While Hancock hailed the development plan as key to regional growth, it was the source of some fissures between potential members.

Notably, both Adams County and Aurora argued that Denver should return undeveloped land that had initially been acquired for creating an airport back to Adams County, according to [previous](#) DBJ reports.

Officials from both entities later showed support for the general concept of growth surrounding the airport, but they also [asserted a clause](#) in a 1988 intergovernmental agreement that states any development on land that Denver annexed from the county at that time must be confined to aviation purposes.

By 2018, those localities had agreed to work with Brighton, Commerce City, Denver and DIA on the Aerotropolis Regional Committee to coordinate land use, infrastructure and marketing for the area.

Today, the committee's members nearly form a geographical wall on the east side of DIA, from as far north as Thornton south to Aurora.

A few projects have since developed on what is technically aerotropolis land, such as company facilities for Outrider, Western Industrial Contractors, and Global Thermostat according to a spokesperson.

Ken Cope, senior vice president of real estate development for DIA, said in an email that the airport's strategic development plan, finalized in 2019, envisions a number of districts as prime locations for development — particularly along Peña Boulevard.

"That said, DEN is accepting of development offers through its Rolling Request for Offers process on any of those 16,000 acres that are not necessary for aeronautical use," Cope said.

He added that the aerotropolis has a number of benefits for developers, such as the ability to lease versus purchase land and flexibility in parcel size. Meanwhile, he said the additional revenue from development helps the airport keep a competitive pricing model for airlines and plan for future maintenance and growth.