

Headline: Economics of Airport Development

Publication: Searchlight

Paper Date: May 30, 2008

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### **“Equipment here, earthworks soon!”**

The stage is now set and the tractors will soon start rolling, making most Vincentians’ dream a reality: Earthworks for the Argyle International Airport will soon commence.

Since September 2005, one month after the Hon. Prime Minister’s Ralph Gonsalves’s 8<sup>th</sup> August 2005 speech on the Argyle airport project, the International Airport Development Company (IADC) has been coordinating the local and international technical work to prepare the “ground work” for the actual construction of the airport. During the past two and a half years or so, much has been accomplished.

#### **Preliminary works**

During the period September 2005 to September 2006, 14 engineers and technicians from Cuba and Venezuela were in St. Vincent doing the pre-design works. These include: (a) complete topographic surveys of the area earmarked for the airport, (b) testing of the rocks and soils for the earthworks, and (c) wind studies to determine the best orientation of the main runway. They also looked at the need, if any, for a shorter “cross-wind” runway for smaller planes that might be affected by high gusts while attempting to use the main runway. Wind studies will continue, but other studies were completed by September 2006.

#### **Final designs**

During the last two and a half years also, a team of Cuban engineers have been working on the final designs, which were completed and presented to the IADC in December 2007. This week, the details of those designs were discussed with local stakeholders and the regional regulatory body, the Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority (ECCAA). The ECCAA, which had previously reviewed the preliminary designs, verbally expressed its satisfaction with the technical specifications of the designs and was complimentary with regard to the high quality of work done by the Cuban design team.

#### **Environmental issues**

In constructing the international airport, IADC is taking all necessary steps to ensure, that due consideration is taken of the environmental issues involved. In consideration of this, an experienced firm, Kocks Consult of Germany was contracted to do an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the Argyle airport project. Their final report that is due this month will provide us with, among other things, a set of recommendations of the kind of measures the IADC should take to reduce the negative impact on the environment of the construction of the airport and to amplify the positive outcomes from the government’s decision to build the airport.

IADC is already positioning itself to implement the recommendations of the EIA report. As a first step, we have appointed an in-house Environmental Auditor, to coordinate the work of a team drawn from the public sector and other stakeholders. The main role of this team would be to ensure that the construction work on the airport project proceeds in an environmentally sound manner. The local Environmental Auditing team would be supported by the Cuban Environmental Agency, which is now studying the draft final EIA report and has agreed to provide training and oversight of the team’s work in implementing the Environmental Management Plan.

### **New roads**

The construction of the Argyle bypass road, at an estimated cost of US\$5.2 million, is perhaps one of the most obvious indicators of the progress being made on the ground, on the construction of the Argyle International Airport. This road is scheduled to be completed sometime in the latter half of the 2008 and will become important when we disrupt the existing highway road as work moves to the second kilometre of the runway, probably in about 1½ years after earthworks commence. IADC is also coordinating the work to build or improve an access road to Rawacou Pond and for persons who would continue to reside on the Eastern side of the runway. This road will be constructed around the same time when earthworks begin.

### **Homeowners cooperation**

Perhaps one of the glorious outcomes of all our work so far in building the international airport is the high level of cooperation the IADC has received from the affected homeowners of Mt Pleasant and Argyle in arriving at price settlements with them and their efforts to relocate swiftly from their homes. This level of collaboration is truly historic in its magnitude and is better understood against the political divide in this country and inciting by a few persons for homeowners to not cooperate with the IADC. The outcomes to date make many statements, not least of which is that the overwhelming majority of affected homeowners ignore senseless and unpatriotic ranting, support the government's decision on the airport project, and are willing to make a sacrifice for the continued development of this country for the present and future generations of people. With the support of the homeowners, the IADC has now paid 107 to the tune of \$44.8 million. There are still 22 properties to be purchased at an estimated price of EC\$11.6 million.

### **Earthworks commencement**

We cannot thank the Mt Pleasant and Argyle homeowners enough for making it possible for the earthworks to begin. On Monday 19<sup>th</sup> May, thirteen new pieces of heavy equipment arrived at the Campden Park Port for the Government of St Vincent, one of the first shipments of equipment promised by the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as part of its assistance with the earthworks stage of the project. The equipment that came are: 3 – Caterpillar tractors D8, 2 – Caterpillar tractors D6, 3 – Hydraulic excavators, 3 – Motor graders, and 2 – Backhoe loaders. These 13 items cost US\$4.9 million (EC\$13.3 million) and are expected to be followed in the near future by a shipment of another 29 pieces of equipment, bring the total to 42 pieces to begin the earthworks. By any measure, this assistance alone by the Government and people of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela represents a significant contribution to the development of our beloved country.

Already, the Cuban team of designers and the advance team of Planning Engineers have arrived in the state to prepare the work plan for the earthworks. In the coming weeks, the IADC would be selecting and entering into contract for the workmen from Cuba to operate the heavy equipment. Vincentians will not have to wait much longer now to see an epoch making event in the history of our country: the beginning of the construction of the Argyle International Airport.