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Improvement projects prepare to take off at Tunica airport

Memphis Business Journal - by [Michael Sheffield](#)

More than \$10 million in construction at the **Tunica Municipal Airport** could get under way this year on projects ranging from the airport's long-discussed new terminal to a transportation courtyard and new fire station.

The airport has received funding from the **Federal Aviation Administration**, the **Mississippi Department of Transportation** and the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, including an expected \$1.25 million in stimulus funding for construction of the fire station, says Cliff Nash, executive director of the airport.

The airport is expanding its apron with \$1.5 million from the FAA.

"We've got until June 5 to spend MDOT funds or those go away," Nash says. "There is \$850,000 that we have to use or we can't receive stimulus funding. We're not allowed to hold it over for the terminal, even though we'd prefer to do that."

The MDOT money will fund a transportation courtyard to be located near the airport's new terminal.

Allen & Hoshall is partnering with Minneapolis-based **Architectural Alliance** on the construction projects.

Memphis-based **APAC Tennessee, Inc.**, has done most of the paving work at the airport. Phillip Rodgers, project manager for APAC, says stimulus funding has helped the firm get more work after seeing huge declines last summer.

"It definitely helps us hire back our laid off workers if they're still available and bring in new people," Rodgers says. "We probably had 15 guys over there. It wasn't a big job, but it's better than nothing."

Nash says the terminal project can still be funded without federal stimulus money, primarily from a \$10 million bond from Tunica County. That project remains one of the airport's most pressing needs.

He says the airport is 30% ahead of its passenger pace from last year, when more than 59,000 passengers passed through the airport.

"We're at 27,000 so far this year," he says. "Last year we were at 22,000."

Nash says if the county bonds are released this summer, construction could start on the terminal by August; construction on the fire station is expected to start at the same time. Both would be finished by August 2010. Once the terminal is completed, Nash says, the next step would be to build an air traffic control tower, which would be budgeted at \$1.5 million-\$1.8 million.

"That would open us up to military and larger corporate jets," Nash says. "We're already qualified to get a tower staff, but we'd have to build it."

Tunica Municipal Airport

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Charter flight of Texas passengers headed for the Tunica casinos is marshaled in Tuesday at Tunica Municipal Airport.

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