

The Portland airport's billion-dollar bet

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Mar 23, 2017, 3:46pm PDT **Updated** Mar 27, 2017, 10:19am PDT

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The number of passengers moving through [Portland International Airport](#) has surged right along with the region's population. In fact, the number of people who boarded or deplaned at PDX last year rose 9 percent year-over-year to 18 million.

So far, PDX has managed to keep pace and retain its ranking as a top performer nationally. The airport has been recognized by Travel+Leisure magazine as the nation's "best domestic airport" for the past four years. And it touched down smoothly in the top 25 of U.S. airports in [American City Business Journal's first-ever Airport Power Rankings](#), compiled using data from nearly 90 airports.



But with business and leisure travel through PDX predicted to continue its rapid growth over the next decade or more, the airport will need to undergo some serious upgrades to maintain its top-tier status. It has a plan — a \$1 billion plan that would be paid for by the airlines that serve PDX.

"You have to get buy-in from the airlines because the airlines, or the customers, will ultimately pay for it," said [Michael Boyd](#), an aviation analyst with BoydGroup International, who added that getting that buy-in is a tall order. "If you say you want

to plant a daisy, the airlines will tell you it costs too much.”

PDX is banking that the efficiencies gained by the improvements will be enough to win the investment in an environment where airlines are weighing the value of high-dollar capital projects at airports nationwide.

The latest proposal on the table from PDX builds on improvements that are already in motion.

Construction is underway on a new \$67 million rental car facility, and the [Port of Portland](#), which operates PDX, has plans for a new \$246 million parking structure. Those projects don't require airline funding. Instead, they're being paid for by parking revenue and user fees that are applied to rental car bills.

The airlines have signed off on funding for a \$215 million project to extend concourse E.