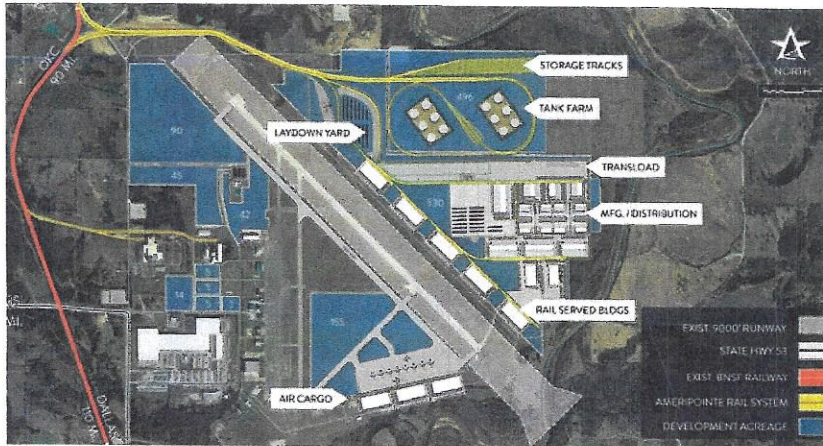


Project runway: Ardmore development has grand new plan

By: Molly M. Fleming The Journal Record May 4, 2017 0



An artist's conception depicts an aerial view of the planned Ameripointe Logistics Park in Ardmore.
(Courtesy rendering)

ARDMORE – A 7,200-foot runway was extended in 2010 with the hope that Nanjing Automobile Corp. would bring an MG automobile assembly plant to the city.

The plant's operations would have required nearly 600 employees, giving an estimated \$189 million boost to the economy.

But the company never came. The now 9,000-foot runway went nowhere.

Now, there's a new plan for the runway and its surrounding land. The plan could give the area a competitive advantage over other industrial sites.

The city of Ardmore and logistics company Ameripointe created a public-private partnership to develop the 2,000 acres around the runway into the Ameripointe Logistics Park. It sits 7 miles east of Interstate 35, directly behind the Dollar General Distribution Center. The park extends to Bernie Conway Road. The Chickasaw Nation owns an adjacent 150 acres in the southeast corner that can be marketed with the park as well.

The park can accommodate jets as big as a Boeing 757 and trains up to 125 cars long. There is a 6-mile loop rail line that connects directly to the rail line going to Dallas. It's also a foreign trade zone.

"This is a multi-modal business park," said Scott Pribula, chief operating officer for Ameripointe. "I think we're one of 10 locations in the U.S. that have this type of infrastructure."

Pribula didn't share an exact price for the company's investment, but just getting the railroad spur is costly.

"It's a sizable sum," he said.

The site has been certified by Burlington Northern Santa Fe LLC, meaning it is the short list for BNSF customers who want to relocate their businesses. The BNSF Certified Site program started with four places and is now up to 10, including Ardmore. Other cities on the list include Los Lunas, New Mexico; Newton, Kansas; and Shelby, Montana.

The site can hold up to 6 million square feet of buildings, creating room for multiple businesses, which could need as many as 8,500 employees.

Ardmore Development Authority President and CEO Mita Bates said the city's workforce comes from as far as 50 miles away.

"This is not only huge to Ardmore but to southern Oklahoma," she said.

The jobs will be welcomed in the region, according to the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics March report. Carter County, which is home to Ardmore, has only a 4.5-percent unemployment rate. But the county's western neighbor,

Stephens County, has a 6.7-percent unemployment rate. Some areas in North Texas have a 5-percent unemployment rate.

Pribula said he and city leaders think it will be an attractive site for companies that want to reach north Dallas and Oklahoma City.

"We believe this is a north Texas play," he said. "When people start thinking about Denton, Texas, maybe they'll start thinking a little further north."

Denton is recruiting tenants for its Westpark Industrial Park, which is along I-35. It has 700 acres remaining for development. It has a Kansas City Southern Railway Co. spur access.

Pribula said he thinks he'll be able to announce the first business soon. He even told Gov. Mary Fallin that the next time he sees her at the site it will be for a groundbreaking ceremony.

"We've been very selective with who we talk to," he said. "We don't want a company to be a startup. We want to have a good, sound business with good credit."

Because if a business fails in the park, and jobs are lost, that could send a ripple effect through the community. The city has been waiting for nearly 10 years for something to happen at the site. Bates has watched the process the entire time.

She said she's pleased the site has such a grand new plan.

"It's taken longer than anyone would like, but all things that are worthwhile take longer than you initially anticipate," she said. "Once that first business is physically located in Ameripointe, you'll see things move so quickly it will be astounding and exciting."