HARTSFIELD-JACKSON TO BEGIN $6 BILLION EXPANSION PLAN

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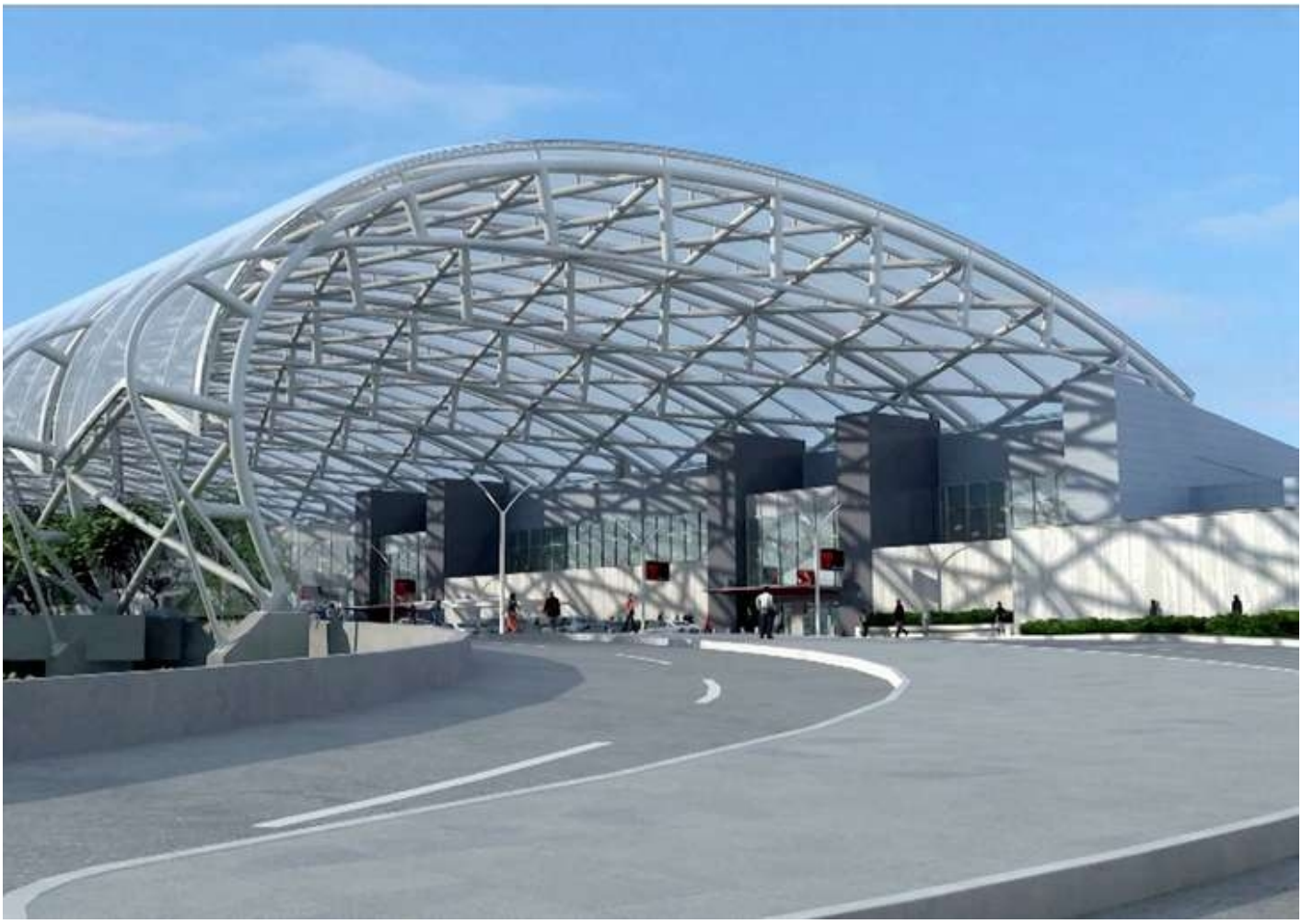

Hartsfield-Jackson International will soon start work on a $6 billion expansion and makeover that will update the domestic terminal and concourses, introduce new features like a hotel and eventually add another concourse and runway to the world's busiest airport.

It's part of a 20-year plan aimed at maintaining Hartsfield-Jackson's status as a leading airport, replacing aging facilities and enabling growth.

It won't be easy on travelers. The plan entails a series of construction projects in different areas of the airport, which could change traffic patterns both inside and out.

Maintaining regular operations during the work "is going to be probably one of the more complicated things," said Frank Rucker, the airport's assistant general manager of planning.

First up: Work starts in coming months on a new parking deck next to the Georgia International Convention Center that will be used while the domestic terminal parking garages are demolished

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and replaced in years to come.

Later in 2016, after the busy summer season, concourse renovations will begin. The project includes lifted ceilings and added glass for a more open look, as well as new waiting area furniture.

Massive canopies over the curbside pick-up and drop-off areas will also be coming within a couple years, along with updates to the atrium and north terminal ticketing area.

“A lot of the focus right out of the gate will be on upgrading our facilities,” Rucker said.

Hartsfield-Jackson to begin $6 billion expansion plan photo

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A new hotel, expected to be operated under the InterContinental brand, is planned for a site just west of the domestic terminal. Guests could walk to it from the terminal.

Airport officials and Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed will tout the plan at what’s billed as an inaugural “State of the Airport” event at the Georgia World Congress Center on Thursday.

The event, expected to draw 750 people with skin in the airport game, is hosted by the Metro Atlanta Chamber and World Trade Center Atlanta. It will be emceed by hyper-voluble CNN anchor and aviation correspondent Richard Quest.

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The building and renovation program, which airport officials call ATLNext, stems from development of an updated airport master plan in 2014.

Master plans are not binding, and longer-term elements, such as another runway or more concourses, depend on how passenger growth plays out. But most major items in Hartsfield-Jackson's last master plan — a fifth runway, international terminal and new rental car complex — got built.

The airport already has begun hiring contractors to manage the renovation of the terminal, the demolition and reconstruction of bigger parking garages and an expansion of cargo facilities, among other projects.

Much of the work will happen in the next eight years, when the airport plans to do up to $4 billion worth of construction.

Parking deck headaches

One of the biggest headaches for travelers is still years away: tear down and reconstruction of the aging parking decks, set to start in 2021. During some seven years of construction, many passengers who normally park in the garages will use the replacement parking garage — but they they will have to take the Sky Train people-mover to get to the terminal.

"That is going to cause quite a bit of commotion," Rucker acknowledged.

The hassle during the years-long parking reconstruction "seems to be the one area where Atlanta travelers will be shorted," said Joe Leader, a Dunwoody resident who is CEO of the Airline Passenger Experience Association.

"People enjoy being within walking distance of the airport … It's the one major shortfall because [for] Atlantans, the sacredness of our cars is quite near and dear to our hearts."

The end result will be new parking decks with eight levels, vs. four now.

Some other projects, such as a new "end-around" taxiway off the end of one of the runways, will displace existing airport-run park-ride lots, another factor driving the need to build more parking.

2017 is a peak year for the plan with nearly $1 billion of work expected to be underway, including parking deck construction, five new gates on Concourse T, terminal modernization and preparations for a new 10-gate Concourse G.

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