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Region Can Soar with Aerotropolis

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By Representatives John Dingell and Candice Miller

Michigan has an opportunity to modernize its approach to the global marketplace. This opportunity would develop more good paying jobs while expanding Michigan's role in national and international commerce. By increasing passenger and cargo traffic at Detroit Metro and Willow Run airports, the Detroit area is poised to create a model for economic development that is ahead of the international curve. An aerotropolis between these two airports would take advantage of 25,000 acres of undeveloped property for industrial parks, hospitality centers, entertainment, and rapid transit centers.

The Michigan-Ontario frontier is already a key gateway for international trade. The Ambassador Bridge in Detroit and the Blue Water Bridge in Port Huron are the two busiest commercial crossings on the Northern Border. Interstates 94, 69, and 75, which are major trade routes throughout the U.S., all have their genesis in Southeast Michigan. The CN Rail Tunnel in Port Huron is the busiest rail port of entry in the United States.

The preferred transportation method of the 21st century is aviation. The global nature of our economy requires an expeditious way to connect people and goods, and aviation provides that service. As a result, airports themselves are becoming major international crossroads of economic growth. Industry and commerce are taking advantage of growth in these areas to systematically locate new and existing businesses near airports.

The concept to stimulate this development is an aerotropolis - a vast complex that centers on major airports and features warehouses, offices, shopping, convention centers, and housing. Proper development of these structures in and around major airports can serve as a job engine for regional economies. Experts who specialize in this field believe that Detroit is a prime candidate for development of an aerotropolis. It is easy to see why given our status as the Midwest's jumping off point for Southeast Asia, a world-renowned manufacturing center, and an international highway crossroads.

Officials from Wayne County and Detroit Renaissance have seized on this opportunity and have developed plans to construct an aerotropolis between these two airports. At its peak, the aerotropolis could create up to 60,000 jobs and attract 40,000 residents. If successful, these efforts will mark a dramatic leap in making Southeast Michigan an international economic powerhouse.

Such a concept requires the full utilization of existing infrastructure. Passenger and freight rail will take on new importance to our region. Plans are already underway to connect Detroit and Ann Arbor through commuter rail. Mass transit holds great promise for our region and this link could be the beginning of a high speed commuter rail system which could encompass St. Clair, Macomb, Wayne, and Washtenaw Counties. Such a transportation link will create greater freedom for our residents allowing us to work and live where we choose. Additional benefits would include reduced traffic congestion on our heavily traveled roads, decreased air pollution, and new economic growth in regions that have struggled under the decline of our manufacturing base.

H.R. 2881, a bill reauthorizing the Federal Aviation Administration which was just passed by the House of Representatives, establishes a pilot program to allow certain airports to use Passenger

Facility Charges (PFCs) for qualified intermodal ground access projects. Historically, the FAA has limited the use of these funds for projects at the airport proper. If enacted, this pilot program will allow up to five airports to use PFC funds to promote access to and around those airports. Examples of intermodal ground access projects include new or expanded passenger and freight rail lines, busways, and connections to major highways.

Under this pilot program, existing funds could be directed to projects which would be critical to constructing an aerotropolis in Detroit. During debate on this legislation, the Chairman of House Transportation and Infrastructure urged the FAA to give the Wayne County Airport Authority priority consideration for participation in this pilot program.

The aerotropolis can be a huge impetus for economic growth in Southeast Michigan. The creation of new jobs that the project will potentially bring will keep our state's highly skilled workforce employed and doing their part to transition our economy. A Detroit aerotropolis would help Michigan regain its top standing in innovation and help preserve middle class jobs that are necessary for a healthy economy. As your federal representatives in Washington work together to reposition Michigan's economic outlook, the proposed intermodal ground access pilot program would go a long way towards those efforts.