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Tampa International Airport train and car rental center open Feb. 14, with big office project in the pipeline

By [Richard Danielson](#)



In Phase II of its \$2 billion expansion, Tampa International Airport plans to develop 17 acres with a 9-story office building, two hotels, shops and a convenience store and gas station. A new multi-story atrium would connect to both the office building and one of the planned hotels. Between the atrium and the SkyConnect train station would be an elevated pedestrian bridge. (Rendering courtesy of Tampa International Airport)

TAMPA — Tampa International Airport has spent nearly a billion dollars so far on its most ambitious expansion in decades, and it's not nearly done.

On Feb. 14, the airport will open its new massive, airy and more convenient rental car building, with 2.6 million square feet of counter space, vehicle parking, maintenance facilities, and weather-sheltered pickup and drop-off areas.

At the same time, the airport's new SkyConnect train will start carrying passengers the 1.4 miles between the main terminal and the car rental center. Meanwhile, the main terminal and airside have gotten a makeover and will, by year's end, have brought in nearly 70 new shops, restaurants and services.

[PREVIOUS COVERAGE: Tampa International Airport morphing into a mini-city unto itself](#)

Up next: a 17-acre Phase II, starting with a 9-story office building encompassing 270,000 square feet of space.

On Thursday, the Hillsborough County Aviation Authority voted to cut a list of potential developers for that building from five to three:

- Van Trust Real Estate, based in Kansas City, Mo., with a development team that includes JE Dunn Construction, HOK, Avison Young, the Walter P. Moore engineering company, VoltAir Consulting Engineers and Kisinger Campo & Associates.
- BTV Aviation Development, a partnership between longtime Tampa developers Dick Beard and Joe Taggart and Cushman & Wakefield executive Lou Varsames. Their team also includes AECOM, Batson-Cook, Trinity Sky Advisors, Citigroup Global Markets, Walter P. Moore, Tierra and Waveguide.
- Lincoln Property, based in Dallas with an office in Orlando, along with HuntonBrady Architects, VoltAir, Walter P. Moore, S&ME and Austin Commercial.

The other two bidders were GPPEJ Florida of Coral Gables and Foundry Commercial, a real estate, development and investment company headquartered in Orlando.

The three short-listed companies will now be asked to submit detailed proposals for the office building and garage. Though Van Trust and BTV were the top-two ranked companies, with just a few points separating their scores, those initial rankings won't give any of them an edge in the next round of evaluations, airport officials said Thursday.

Airport officials expect to select a developer this fall with construction starting in spring 2019 and the new building opening in late 2020.

The developer the airport picks will build the offices at its own expense, but the airport plans to move about 60 percent of its staff into three floors of the building and is talking about buying the building three to five years after it moves in. The aviation authority needs to move some of its offices out of the main terminal anyway to make room for curbside improvements for passenger pickup and drop-off.

Along with the office building, Phase II of the airport expansion is expected to include two hotels, shops and a gas station and convenience store — plus an multi-story atrium connecting the offices and one of the hotels, and an elevated walkway between the atrium and the SkyConnect train station. The train recently completed a 30-day demonstration run with no problems.

[**STORY WITH VIDEO: A first look at Tampa airport's shuttle trams**](#)

While the airport isn't paying for construction of the office building, it does plan to cover costs associated with preparing the 17 acres for development (\$13.5 million), building the atrium and pedestrian bridge (\$53.6 million) and building out its own facilities on the three floors it leases (\$42.5 million).

Airport revenues will cover nearly all of those costs, according to TIA spokeswoman Janet Scherberger. No state or federal grants will be used.

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