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## Pickens airport terminal work gets off ground

\$1 million project to be ready in spring

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A project county leaders say is at the heart of an extensive improvement drive at the Pickens County Airport officially got underway Tuesday.

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"We believe that any county that wants to be extremely successful and recruit business must have an adequate airport," Pickens County Administrator Chappell Hurst said. "That's one of the priorities that almost all of the industries require."

Under a bright blue sky, officials turned dirt for the \$1 million terminal project that will create a 4,000-square-foot facility.

Hurst said most of the money for the terminal will be federal and state funds, along with some money from the county.

"We're trying to make this airport self-sustaining, and by having better facilities we will attract more aircraft," he said. "We'll see more business, which will mean we'll sell more fuel."

Profits from fuel sales can go to operate the airport, he said.

Work on the terminal started about three weeks ago, according to Hurst, and should be finished in the spring.

He said the new terminal will have a conference room, a pilot lounge, a display and lobby area, offices and break room.

"It's almost like a welcome center," Hurst said.

Neel Hipp Jr., chairman of the state Aeronautics Commission, said the airport is a gateway to western North Carolina, western South Carolina and Pickens County and said it generates almost \$11 million for the local economy every year.

"It is an incredibly important resource," Hipp said. "It is the front door to this county. ... Having a first-class airport and a first-class terminal building is just going to make so much difference."

Hurst said the next phase will be construction of new hangars. The \$1 million project will include 10 T-hangars and six box hangars, he said, and the work should take through next year.

Other future changes include a runway extension and a \$122,000 highway enhancement grant that will be used for improvements at the airport entrance along U.S. 178, including new signage, street lighting and plantings.