Airport expansion set to begin Oct. 12

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SENECA — The long-awaited 600-foot runway extension at the Oconee County Airport is about to begin with high hopes that the $4.25 million upgrade will expand economic development opportunities.

Airport Director Kevin Short said Thursday that construction work to lengthen the runway to 5,000 feet would begin on Columbus Day, Oct. 12.

Short called the start of the project the culmination of more than six years of planning, studies and preparations. Consultants have long preached to county officials that a 5,000-foot runway is the key to accommodating larger corporate aircraft.

Jay Talbert, a principal with Talbert & Bright Inc., the county's airport consultant, predicts the runway will attract bigger jets that need more fuel. More importantly, it broadens the pool of potential companies that would contemplate making Oconee home.

Short warned, however, that with growth would come some growing pains.



FILE PHOTO

Officials expect short travel delays on stretches of Shiloh and Mt. Nebo Church roads at times until the 10-month airport runway expansion project is completed.

He said commuters who travel north and south on Shiloh Road would encounter slow traffic at the west end of the airfield as trucks haul dirt from an area west of Mt. Nebo Church Road to the project site.

Inbound and outbound traffic on Mt. Nebo Church Road also should expect traffic slowdown.

The Federal Aviation Administration picks up 95 percent of the cost of funding the runway extension project. South Carolina and Oconee split the remaining cost.