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The Spokane International Airport has been awarded a federal grant that completes funding for a rail and truck transload facility project designed to attract aerospace and manufacturing industries on the West Plains.

The U.S. Department of Transportation announced Wednesday it awarded the airport a \$11.3 million BUILD grant to construct the transload facility – in which shipments are transferred from trucks to rail and vice versa – that would create jobs, minimize traffic congestion and ease access for businesses to transport goods.

“Spokane has the workforce to drive its manufacturing and shipping economy, but it needs a robust freight infrastructure network to create new jobs and achieve its full potential,” U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., said in a statement. “This grant will enable Spokane International Airport to turn vacant land into a freight hub connecting rail and road infrastructure. That vital connection will mean less congestion on our roads and more efficient transportation for goods, promoting economic growth and job creation in the West Plains.”

The first phase of the project, which called for [construction of a 1-mile short rail line connecting the existing Geiger spur line to the airport property](#), was completed in July.

The project’s second phase will extend 3 miles of rail south from the existing Geiger spur to a freight loading and circulation station

between Craig Road and the airport. It will open up more than 1,000 acres of land that is within opportunity, foreign trade and community empowerment zones.

“It’s really the key piece of critical infrastructure for us to really begin to shape the entire area around the airport as an intermodal hub,” said Larry Krauter, CEO of Spokane International Airport.

Currently, all rail freight in and out of Spokane is delivered to Yardley, a rail yard facility in Spokane Valley, which means trucks have to either use city roads or Interstate 90 to deliver freight.

Krauter said before developing a plan to build the transload facility on the West Plains, the airport examined layouts of several transload facilities across the nation to determine why they were successful.

“We really wanted to make sure we had a long-range plan for building it,” he said. “I’m just thrilled we are going to be able to build the second phase.”

It’s estimated the transload facility project will create up to 7,000 jobs, generate \$77 million in tax revenue and produce \$773 million in total economic impact from business and manufacturing it’s expected to attract to the area, according to the airport.

“The Spokane International Airport continues to be a leader in our community in both transportation and economic development,” Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers said in a statement. “I’m so thankful for their leadership and excited to see them use this grant to continue to connect Eastern Washington with the rest of the world.”

The proposed facility is the latest in several investments on the West Plains that include a new transit center, I-90 interchange improvements and [business expansion in the area](#).

Amazon is expected to open its \$181 million fulfillment center by mid-2020, while Kenworth Sales Co., Selkirk Pharma and Mullen Technologies are planning to open manufacturing facilities on the West Plains.

California-based Mullen Technologies is [expected to bring 860 jobs to the area with production of its Qiantu K-50 electric sports car](#) as well as research and development of lithium-ion batteries.

“The transload facility not only supports infrastructure we were hoping to have for Mullen, it now makes the West Plains attractive to those companies that don’t use rail enough to justify the cost of having their own spur,” said Al French, Spokane County commissioner and West Plains PDA board member.

The West Plains is also home to manufacturing and industrial firms such as Exotic Metals Forming Co., Seaport Steel, Zak Designs, Collins Aerospace and Triumph Composite.

Construction on the transload facility is anticipated to begin next year and is slated for completion by November 2021.

