

Airports
21st-Century Makeovers for the New York Metro Region

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Welcoming remarks delivered at the conference by
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Some of you may be wondering why the Newman Real Estate Institute is cosponsoring a conference on airports.

The Institute has a broad agenda because real estate interests generate, and converge with, a multitude of public policy issues. Airports are a dramatic case in point. Our region has the largest airport system in the nation. Its smooth functioning – and the regional interconnectivity that facilitates the flow of people and goods – are vital to our economy. This links Airports directly to real estate market values.

And, the performance of our airports directly affects our economy's global competitiveness, including our ability to attract foreign investment, which in turn affects our real estate market.

What's more, airports aren't simply functional. They're driving forces for development. On a web site named [Aerotropolis](#), John Kasarda predicts that airports will shape business location and urban development in the 21st century as much seaports did in the 18th century, railroads in the 19th, and highways in the 20th.

But for most of the public, the significant policy issues related to airports have tended to remain "under the radar." This may be changing. Notably, yesterday's New York Times reported on a new federal "Future of Aviation Advisory Committee." The committee's composition cuts across the industry – exactly the kind of collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach that today's conference reflects.

And what will this committee find when it examines our region's airports?

- JFK, La Guardia, and Newark are operating at or near capacity, with aging infrastructure and outmoded technologies.
- Physically, they can't expand beyond their perimeters.
- Projected population growth will worsen congestion not just at airports but for the ground transportation systems that serve them.

This makes for a tough set of challenges:

- How to accommodate rapid growth in air traffic within rigid space constraints.
- How to upgrade aging 20th-century infrastructure and outmoded technologies while maintaining safe, secure, and efficient operations.
- And, how to accomplish all of this sustainably, in a period of fiscal austerity.

Happily, long before the formation of the new federal advisory committee, a lot of very, very smart people started working hard to meet these challenges. We'll be hearing from some of them today. Their presentations will convince you, I think, that our airports are at a dramatic, historic, turning point.

When this history is written, one of the players who will loom largest, as a visionary and a results-oriented executive, is our next speaker. Central casting has given our region the right man, in the right place, at the right time: a truly gifted, and caring, public servant whose leadership is reshaping our built environment in ways that will be a legacy for future generations. I'm delighted to introduce to you the executive director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey: Christopher Ward.