



Airport Proposals Fly while the Public Feels Grounded

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Both Kansas City and Saint Louis are considering major changes to each of their biggest public assets: their airports. While the circumstances of each project are different, the inclination of some officials to avoid public scrutiny may sink both efforts. Regardless of the merits of any proposal, the process must remain open and transparent to taxpayers.

In Kansas City, the effort to spend \$1.2 billion on a new single terminal has been limping along for years. Beset from the beginning by self-inflicted wounds from Aviation Department leadership and an aversion to open discussion (Mayor James recently tried to require elected officials to sign [non-disclosure agreements](#) about competing bids), the effort now appears to be racing toward a November election. Voter support is in no way assured.

In Saint Louis, a consortium of business interests and former city officials are moving forward with a privatization effort that has [yet to be the subject of much public discussion](#) . While free-market solutions are a worthwhile consideration for many public services, market decisions are [only as good as the information available](#) .

Why the secrecy over matters that are obviously of great public interest? If Kansas City and Saint Louis are developing good plans for managing, developing, or privatizing their airports, their

leaders should be confident that they can defend the plans in the marketplace of ideas. If the plans are flawed, isn't it better to expose the problems while there is still time to make adjustments?

One thing is certain. The longer deliberations are kept secret, the more the inference will grow that the officials leading the efforts have something to hide. It makes for an inauspicious start for what will, eventually and inevitably, become campaigns for public approval.

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