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Southern Zone Airport Advances
By Rebecca Kimitch

The prospect of taking a direct flight from the sophisticated streets of London to the untamed jungles of Costa Rica's Southern Zone may be on its way to becoming a reality. Officials recently selected a site between the towns of Sierpe and Palmar Sur, off the Inter-American Highway, as the future home of the still-unnamed Southern Zone international airport.

While some hope the airport will push the area to become as internationally popular as the northwestern province of Guanacaste, where development is burgeoning and the airport needs expansion, others worry it might destroy the untouched wilds of a region known for its remoteness.

Promises of a Southern Zone airport have been made for years; however, the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation (MOPT) finally appears to be moving forward with the plan.

The Southern Zone Development Authority (JUDESUR) has agreed to provide €600 million (\$1.2million) to fund part of the next step to making the airport a reality—developing an airport master plan and conducting thorough soil and climatic studies.

"We have seen the experience Guanacaste has had since the construction of (Daniel Oduber International) airport. Tourism there has grown greatly and campesinos are able to export their products—they have direct access to international markets. This is the experience we want for the Southern Zone," Explained William Perez, executive director of JUDESUR, a semi-autonomous government institution that distributes government funds in the Southern Zone.

JUDESUR may provide additional funds to complete the three preliminary reports, or other funds can be obtained relatively easily, according to Vice-Minister of Public Works and Transport Eduardo Montero...

...He expects the studies to take a year, and, if resources are allocated immediately, the South Zone could see a new airport five years later...

...The Palmar Sur site was chosen in part for its centralized location, with easy access to the Southern Zone's tourist attractions, such as Corcovado National Park, the Golfo Dulce and Dominical Beach.

In addition, the airport will mainly be on Agricultural Development Institute (IDA) lands, simplifying the expropriation process, Montero said. It also offers appropriate climatic and geographic conditions for flying.