

Dominica Signs Agreement For First International Airport of Commonwealth

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Rendering of the Dominica International Airport project announced during a ceremony Thursday, June 10 2021 in Dominica.

ROSEAU, Dominica, CMC –Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerit is predicting that an international airport will become a reality for Dominica by 2025 as he inked an agreement with the Canadian-based Montreal Management Consultants Establishment Limited (MMCE) on Wednesday night.

Skerit said the one billion dollar (One EC dollar=US\$0.37 cents) venture to be situated on land between the Woodford Hill and Wesley villages on the island's northeast coast, will be funded under the Citizenship by Investment Program (CBI).

Under the CBI, Dominica provides citizenship to foreign investors who make a significant contribution to the socio-economic development of the island.

"Today the government which I have the honor to lead has delivered the first tangible and visible step towards making the international airport a reality in Dominica," he said. "Today we see the evidence of its substance about to take shape in Dominica.

"After today, the airport will begin to rise out of the ground. Then from the ground to the air and I give you this solemn assurance that plans will land here direct from Europe and the United States in 2025," Skerit said at the public signing ceremony held at the Windsor Park Stadium in the heart of the capital.

He described the signing ceremony "as an historic moment that will re-define the future of Dominica and its people".

Skerit said the airport project will create a significant number of jobs on the island, adding that "during the construction phase, we expect that some 3,000 people would be directly employed and many more will indirectly benefit from this project."

He added, "On completion, the airport will provide permanent employment opportunities in a variety of areas for our young people in particular. It will open up opportunities for a range of providers of goods and services....these will add several hundred new jobs to the national economy."

Skerit said that in addition, jobs will also be provided within the tourism sector as a result of the new international airport.

"But this is only the beginning. Our international airport will provide a platform for further development. It will be Dominica's door to the world and the world's gateway to a dynamic Dominica," Skerit said.

"This government is building a new society and new economy. We are building the dynamic Dominica," he stated, adding that analysis has shown that countries have in the past benefitted greatly from infrastructural development.

"Further estimates suggest that governments across the world will need to spend more than US\$40 trillion by 2040 if they are to provide infrastructure to a growing population, expected to number 9.1 billion people in that year," the prime minister said.

Skerit said that the multi-lateral financial institutions cover less than 10 percent of the financing gap, "forcing governments to rely primarily on private capital...and heavy domestic taxation."

"And so those who are against the CBI funds must tell the people of Dominica how would they finance the construction of the international airport," he said, making reference to the global landscape in which small island developing states like Dominica "are forced to compete."

"Capital to build an international airport is impossible to come by for a country like Dominica, and if you get it it will be very expensive and if it is very expensive the people of Dominica must pay for it. And how will the Dominican people pay for it? By increased taxes."

Skerit added, "I have not met one Dominican who says 'Skerit I want to pay more taxes in Dominica.'"

MMCE's chief executive officer, Dr. Anthony Haiden said his company is delighted to be partner with Dominica on the new venture.

"MMCE is privileged, honored to contribute to this history-making initiative as we embark on a legendary project," he said, adding that the company values its "long lasting relationship with Dominica and is ready and able to work closely with the government, not only for this project, but for many other future projects".

Late last month, the chief executive officer of the International Airport Development Company, Samuel Johnson, said he was standing behind the decision to engage the US-based global aviation consulting firm Landrum & Brown to design the airport.

Johnson said the U.S. firm has a tremendous track record and brings a wealth of experience to the job.

"I have gone through several of the studies that have been done over the years and Landrum & Brown is a global professional services firm. They have been around quite a bit with focus primarily on aviation planning and development," he added.

Meanwhile, a handful of opposition supporters staged a protest outside the stadium calling on the government to account for the "billions" of dollars secured under the CBI.

"The agreement that Roosevelt Skerrit plans to sign ...with his friend Anthony Haiden is not about an international airport. It's a contract to allow for massive bobol with over one billion dollars of Dominica's passport money which they are already holding unconstitutionally and unlawfully," Opposition Leader, Lennox Linton wrote on his Facebook page.

"With this agreement they will wash our passport billions from unlawful private control to legal ownership. Stop it!!!," he added.