



What Is Going On with the KCI Project?

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By: Patrick Tuohy

No one seems to know what is going on with the KCI new single terminal project. Or if they do know, they aren't leveling with the public. A recent story in [The Kansas City Star](#) includes the following:

The conversation with [Southwest Airlines chief executive Gary] Kelly, which [Mayor Sly] James initially denied but Southwest confirmed, happened early in the week. James, through a spokeswoman, said the conversation was about cost sharing among airlines for a baggage handling system at the KCI terminal, a \$20 million element in the project but a fraction of the overall cost.

I don't know why the mayor would have initially denied speaking with an executive at Southwest. However, it is the sort of tactic that proponents of the new single terminal have been employing [since the very beginning](#). Remember that proponents of the new terminal told us that there is no correlation between ticket prices and the fees airlines pay to fund airports. But Spirit and Allegiant Airlines have made it clear [there is a connection](#).

Then we learned the price for the terminal was going way up. [Cat Reid's story](#) on November 1 for KSHB indicated that this wasn't a big deal for the airlines:

The director of the Kansas City Aviation Department, who has been meeting with airline executives across the country, said they have “no anxiety at all” about the \$1.9 billion price tag on the new terminal.

But that wasn't true. The [airlines did have problems](#) with the \$1.9 billion price tag, and are asking to have their own consultants look at the price.

Fox 4 reported on November 15 that Mayor James said the price problem was specific to a dispute about paying for the [new baggage handling system](#) . But that wasn't true, either. While there is a dispute regarding baggage fees, Steve Vockrodt reported on December 2 in the [Star](#) that, yes, the price itself was a point of contention.

Part of the reason why airline buy-in is so important is that Kansas Citians have been told all along that the airlines would be footing the bill without taxpayer funds. But this might not end up being the case—finance department representatives said they might use the general fund to cover initial costs. [Now the city council is acting](#) to make sure that those previous promises are honored.

Regardless of whether officials are misleading the public or simply do not know what they are doing, the airport project appears to be a mess. But [civic leadership](#) is willing to look the other way. Good public policy is unlikely to result from such an awful process.

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- [KCI](#)

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