

Airport to catch Hartsfield's overflow touted

By Frank LoMonte

Morris News Service

ATLANTA — The state should take the lead in building a major airport south of Atlanta linked with Atlanta, Macon and Columbus by a high-speed, magnet-powered train, state transportation officials told Gov. Joe Frank Harris and his top advisers

yesterday.

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Transportation Commissioner Hal Rives and his chief aviation expert endorsed a Middle Georgia site over one in North Georgia, saying a new airport would spread economic growth to that job-starved region.

"I think some of the locations that have been proposed will benefit may-

be some of Alabama, some of Tennessee, but not much of Georgia," Rives told a meeting of the Governor's Development Council.

Harris offered no preference for either option. He said the decision should be left to the next governor — who will take office in January 1991 — and to the airline industry.

Civic leaders in North and South Georgia are floating competing proposals to build airports in their areas that would catch the overflow from Atlanta's Hartsfield International Airport, the nation's second-busiest.

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Airport touted for Georgia to catch Hartsfield overflow

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Jim Stanley, head of the Department of Transportation's public transportation division, said long delays at Hartsfield "will almost certainly inhibit the state's economic growth" if another airport is not built to relieve the strain.

Stanley said the airport would only be useful as a companion to Hartsfield if it was within a 15-minute train ride.

He suggested a triangular-shaped corridor between Atlanta and the Macon-Columbus line as the ideal location, with passengers shuttling between the airports on a high-speed

train.

Still to be decided, however, is who would pay for the airport, which DOT officials figure to be a \$2 billion enterprise.

Harris said the airport would be useful only if the airline industry agrees to serve it. One or more airline companies could choose their own site and offer to finance the project with minimal state help, he said.

"Say, for instance, Delta Airlines decided, 'We are going to pay the lion's share and here is where it's going to go.' Well, that's where it's going to go," the governor said.