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Don't build on speculation

AFTER years of that \$8 million warehouse sitting unused or underused at MidAmerica Airport, it was a relief to learn that Boeing will lease it as a manufacturing site. But before the public even knows what Boeing is going to pay to lease the space, St. Clair County's economic development director sent out a memo about a test flight from China on Thursday and the county's intention to build a new warehouse for air cargo.

That build-it-and-they-will-come stuff hasn't worked out so well up to now. Why are county leaders getting ahead of themselves again?

County Board Chairman Mark Kern points to a test flight as proof MidAmerica can function as an international cargo airport. That's similar to what he said after a test flight of corn from Panama in 2007. Kern said in 2007 that

MidAmerica was within "striking distance" of international air cargo operations. But more than three years later, about all there is to show are intermittent flower flights and the \$3 million worth of specialized equipment purchased for those flights that's now sitting unused.

Kern sounded more restrained when he spoke to The Associated Press on Friday and said a new warehouse or conversion of another building to a warehouse would depend on first having a signed contract with a cargo hauler. That's the way county leaders need to proceed. The contract should be with an established company that will guarantee enough shipments to justify the cost of expansion.

The airport has been open 12 years now and is still losing \$5 million a year. The financial equation must start adding up.