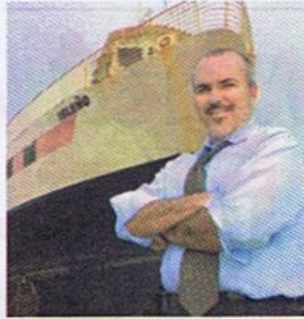


THIS WEEK

It's full speed ahead for Puerto Rico's public ferry system. The government's Maritime Transportation Authority (ATM by its Spanish initials) will invest approximately \$77.1 million this year in capital improvements and new vessels to overhaul the ferry system between Hato Rey, San Juan and Cataño as well as the ferry routes between Fajardo, Vieques and Culebra.

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The Puerto Rico Open golf tournament at the Trump International Golf Club & Residences was a big hit for local tourism, generating at least \$22 million in economic activity, including 7,000 hotel room nights, and providing priceless marketing of the island as an upscale vacation destination.

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TOP STORY

FedEx looks to make Aguadilla airport Caribbean distribution hub

Plans for hangar expansion and processing center could involve investment of \$50 million to \$80 million

BY LAWSON D. THURSTON
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FedEx, a worldwide provider of transportation, e-commerce and business services, plans on expanding its existing operations at the Aguadilla airport to make it its Caribbean distribution hub.

The information was confirmed by Puerto Rico Ports Authority Executive Director Álvaro Pilar, who met with FedEx company officials last week to discuss issues moving forward that will help the company's plan to become a reality.

"We have been in talks with Fedex and they want to expand and improve their facilities in Aguadilla," said Pilar.



Puerto Rico Ports Authority Executive Director Álvaro Pilar indicated the FedEx investment could be anywhere from \$50 million to \$80 million in its Aguadilla operations, making that airport its distribution center for the Caribbean.

"We're talking about a huge hangar in which maintenance can be done on aircraft and an area where packages can be processed and distributed. It would probably involve an investment of \$50 million to \$80 million," noted Pilar.

He added, "They wanted to know what we are going to do about the runway." One of the major projects that the Ports director will be working on is to completely resurface the runway as well as other capital improvements to the Aguadilla airport.

"So we told them that we have a long-term plan to do that and they indicated that they wanted to be a part of that long-term plan."

According to Pilar, although FedEx does distribute to the Caribbean from Aguadilla, it is not quite a complete distribution hub for the region. "Right now they do distribution to the Caribbean from Aguadilla and San Juan and fly directly from Memphis to some of the bigger Caribbean islands.

"They would prefer to have a bigger distribution center in Aguadilla where they could process everything for the entire Caribbean. Once you do that—packages going from the Dominican Republic to St. Thomas for example—why take it to Memphis and then bring it back to the Caribbean? Just bring it here for distribution," added Pilar.

When asked if the FedEx expansion in Aguadilla could be accomplished during the time frame of the current administration, Pilar responded, "I think we can get everything signed and get the ball rolling. During our meeting, the guys from FedEx indicated that they feel very comfortable working from Aguadilla, the labor force is very good and they think that they can get approval from headquarters for their expansion plans." ■