

# Clout team with heavy minority participation wins \$210M airport contract

[Chicago](#) 02/05/2018, 03:35pm  
chicago.suntimes.com  
Fran Spielman

A clout-heavy team with 54 percent participation by minorities and women has scored a \$210 million contract to oversee construction projects for the next decade at O'Hare and Midway airports.

A joint venture that calls itself the "Connect Chicago Alliance" was the highest-ranked of five teams vying for the motherlode of a "program management contract."

It marks a pivotal step in the gate and terminal expansion project billed as the largest in O'Hare history and the \$400 million makeover tailor-made to confront Midway's biggest weaknesses and passenger annoyances: parking, security and concessions.

The joint venture is led by Chicago-based Jacobs Engineering Group.

Its members include Ardmore/Roderick, African-American contractors with a 15 percent share; GSG Consultants, a Latino partner and J.A. Watts, a women's business enterprise, each with a 10 percent cut; Bradshaw Consultants and Globetrotter Engineering, minority business enterprises with five and four percent respectively.

The team also includes smaller participation by Synchronous Solutions; Synnov Group; CKL Engineers; SQN Associates and Sanchez & Associates.

The combined, 54 percent participation — 41 percent by companies owned by minorities and 13 percent for firms controlled by women — was billed as one of the largest in O'Hare history.

It includes a so-called "classroom-style, mentor-protégé approach" aimed at opening the door to minorities and women who have never before had an opportunity to compete for airport contracts.

The joint venture will replace CARE Plus, which has been paid \$98.9 million since January 2011 to provide both program management and construction management services at both O'Hare and Midway.

To ensure a "seamless transition," CARE Plus will be granted a one-year extension. That will make certain that projects like the Midway parking garage, security projects and the ongoing capital improvement project at O'Hare continue without a hitch.

CARE Plus includes: RM Chin (25 percent) HNTB (20 percent); D'Escoto Inc. (10 percent); Heery (10 percent) Autumn (10 percent); Bradshaw Construction (10 percent and Ghafari (15 percent).

Aviation Department spokeswoman Lauren Huffman said the Connect Chicago Alliance was chosen after a “thorough process to oversee a high volume of both existing and new work” at O'Hare and Midway. That includes the massive makeover and expansion of passenger terminals and gates known as “O'Hare 21 program.”

“They will perform design and contract management oversight on a series of massive construction projects currently estimated at several billion dollars — certainly the biggest investment in O'Hare's history,” Huffman wrote in an email to the Chicago Sun-Times.

“The \$210 million is the estimate for budgeted services, providing flexibility for the soon-to-be determined cost of the terminal expansion. But the actual cost will be based on actual services rendered over the next eight years. Further, there is an incentive built into the terms to reduce the overall management costs of the program, including the program management fees.”

During a selection process that dragged on for months, a rival bidder raised questions about the role on the selection committee played by Jonathan Leach.

Leach resigned last summer as O'Hare's \$159,096-a-year chief operating officer and went to work for Chico & Nunes, a Chicago law firm that has long represented Ardmore, whose president and CEO is former Chicago Buildings Commissioner Cheryl Thomas.

The complaint — and an allegation that the Connect Chicago Alliance may have gotten advance warning about the timing of its all-important oral presentation to the selection committee — triggered an investigation by Inspector General Joe Ferguson, according to a losing bidder, who was interviewed by Ferguson's investigators.

Leach could not be reached for comment. The selection of the Connect Chicago Alliance was made before he left the city, even though it took until late December to negotiate and award the contract.

The inspector general's office and Chief Procurement Officer Jamie Rhee refused to confirm or deny the investigation.

But Rhee said if there had been any lingering concerns, the massive contract would not have been awarded.

The heavy participation by minorities comes at a time when embattled Aviation Commissioner Ginger Evans has been under heavy fire to give minorities in general and African-Americans in particular a bigger seat on the gravy train of O'Hare contracts.