

TIME

NEW MEXICO: TO INFINITY... AND BEYOND

In terms of business opportunity in New Mexico, the sky's the limit—literally. As home to the White Sands Missile Range near Las Cruces, the state has the only airspace in the country—other than over the White House—that is restricted from the ground to infinity.

This means that a swath of New Mexico is uniquely situated for a spaceport since no planes or satellites can pass through the area reserved for rocket launches and landings. State officials are scheduled to announce a partnership this week with Virgin Group founder Richard Branson to launch a fleet of ships—based on the Ansari X Prize-winning *SpaceShipOne* design—that will take tourists up to 400,000 ft. on a two-hour journey. Passengers can cover the \$200,000 fare, Virgin Atlantic declared last week, by redeeming 2 million frequent-flyer miles. And, says Virgin Galactic president Will Whitehorn, after a few years “we hope to



The proposed spaceport, depicted above, will anchor Branson's Virgin Galactic, below

bring the cost of the trip below \$100,000.”

Virgin's plans may sound a bit pie in the sky, but a New Mexico official says the state is prepared to shoulder a big chunk of the \$200 million tab to build a spaceport because it will bring in an estimated \$500 million in annual revenues. In addition to Virgin Galactic, the site will host X Prize founder Peter Diamandis' annual cup and his Rocket Racing League (think NASCAR at 5,000 ft. up). Even NASA may send some business out West. The agency last week

completed a study on creating incentives for private industry to develop a way to ferry people and goods to the international space station so NASA can focus on getting to Mars.

—By Clayton Neuman.
With reporting by Helen Gibson

