



New Miami International arrival hub can clear 3,600 passengers an hour

By Scott Blake

Flying into Miami should get easier for international travelers when Miami International Airport opens a new Federal Inspection Services facility this summer.

The three-level, 400,000-square-foot area is scheduled to partially open in July, with all 72 passport control lanes operating to process international arrivals.

"Once fully complete, the new FIS area will be able to process 3,600 international passengers per hour upon their arrival to the US," said Miami International spokesman Greg Chin.

The new area features 10 baggage claim carousels, five of which will open in July on the second level. The ground level features a new greeter's lobby.

The new Federal Inspection Services area is twice the size of the airport's current federal inspection area in Concourse E, which currently serves American Airlines' international flights.

The new federal inspection area is one of the last parts of the airport's multibillion-dollar North Terminal construction project to be completed. The only things remaining to be done on the terminal project is the completion of the federal inspection area and three gates nearest to the old baggage handling system, Mr. Chin said.

Only three gates remain to be completed in the 50-gate "super concourse," which is used by American Airlines as its hub for Latin American and the Caribbean.

The remaining work will be completed once the airport's new baggage handling system is put into permanent use and the old system is dismantled.

The North Terminal already has transformed operations at the county-owned airport.

"Probably North Terminal's greatest asset is that it is now a 1.4-mile long, linear concourse with dual taxiways that allows aircraft to taxi to and from its current 47 gates twice as fast as before construction," Mr. Chin said, "allowing each gate to be used as many as 10 times a day."

The North Terminal currently handles more than 300 flights a day and more than 25 million passengers a year. It is designed to handle up to 500 flights a day.

The extra capacity should be needed, as an independent consultant estimated that Miami International's passenger traffic will grow by 12% by 2018. That appears to be a conservative projection, Mr. Chin said, given that the airport's passenger traffic grew by 7% in 2011 alone.

Because of the terminal project's massive size, parts of it have opened in recent years. In 2010, the North Terminal skytrain opened to transport passengers from end to end in Concourse D within five minutes at a rate of up to 9,000 people an hour.

The terminal also has an expanded Regional Commuter Facility for American Airlines subsidiary American Eagle. It features 14 gates, a passenger waiting area and walkways. Since opening in 2010, the facility serves about 2 million people a year, Mr. Chin said.

Then, last December, the terminal's pre-security area was completed. It provides about 450,000 square feet of new and renovated space for 152 ticket counters, 126 self-service check-in devices, seven domestic baggage claim carousels and four new security checkpoints.

"Lastly," Mr. Chin said, "North Terminal now features a diverse mix of more than 80 popular stores and restaurants."

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