

Airport report

Preparing for the Super Bowl

By Iftikhar Ahmad
Director of Aviation

The Super Bowl returns to New Orleans in 2013 and planning and preparations are underway – especially at the airport. As the host city for the game and a town known for entertainment, the Crescent City will show the fans how to “pass a good time” with our delicious food fare, cool jazz and unique sites. However, the tone and first impression for the fans will be set at the airport and we trust it will be a good one because when Super Bowl fans arrive at Armstrong International Airport, they will be greeted by a major modernization of the existing facility.

Based on the projected financial impact, the capital improvement plan that was in place at the time I was named the director of aviation has been changed significantly as we plan and strategize future infrastructure plans. The projected expenditure for this revised rehabilitation is now \$290 million. With only a window of less than two years to complete the new plan, it will be a major undertaking to have the airport ready by the big game. But it will be done.

In fact, the transformation of the airport is already in progress. In the airport terminal interior, new Flight Information Display System (FIDS) monitors have replaced the old, bulky FIDS and restroom renovations are nearing completion. The Concourse D Expansion project is set to be completed by this August and the Consolidated Rental Car Facility (CONRAC), located west of Concourse D, is scheduled to be finished by October 2012. The CONRAC is especially important for events such as the Super Bowl. In the past, only 800 rental cars were available to visitors. With the completion of the new car rental facility, that number will be increased to 1,800. All of the rental car companies will be in the new multi-level building as opposed to where they are now – scattered around the campus and at different locations on Airline Drive. Best of all, customers will no longer have to wait for a shuttle bus to take them to and from the terminal because the CONRAC will connect to the terminal through a covered walkway. This project, originally expected to cost \$150 million, when first planned for 2001 will now cost half the amount, \$75 million, with our revised plan.

The most notable change at the airport will be the consolidation of the operating concourses from four to two – Concourses C and D. All passengers will depart and arrive on these concourses. The shop area now located near the Concourse

C security check point will be converted into a single, consolidated security checkpoint with up to 11 screening units. This will give flexibility to handle small or large groups of departing passengers depending on the need for security screening. The obvious advantage for our passengers with this plan is that once they have cleared the security checkpoint, they will have access to any shops or restaurants available on all concourses. The obvious question with the consolidation is won't you have less gates for use? The answer is yes but of the 39 gates available now, airlines have a demand for only 20 thereby minimizing the need for more gates at the airport. The ongoing merging of airlines is one factor lessening a demand for gates. Shifting all of the passenger activity to the two concourses may further reduce the gate need but the airport will be in a position to provide a total of 26 gates if airlines were to expand their business in New Orleans.

In regards to our other two concourses – A and B, Concourse A was recently closed to the general public when Northwest Airlines merged with Delta Air Lines and moved to Concourse D leaving only one airline in operation on the concourse. That airline, U.S. Airways, was moved to the end of Concourse B. In the new plan, Concourse B will be used only for charter flights and special operations. The decommissioned Concourse A will become the new office site for the New Orleans Aviation Board staff.

Though this rehabilitation won't get us a world-class status, it will still be a vast improvement over where we are today. I will keep you updated as we make future plans in our quest to become a world class airport through our future plans. ✈



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Check your local listings for the air time of the Armstrong International Airport 30 minute television program, “Airport Alive,” or view it on the airport website, www.flymsy.com by clicking on the “Airport Alive” link in News & Stats. You may also follow us on Twitter and Facebook.

