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PASSENGER FACILITATION

Issue 3, 2026

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AIRPORT WORLD

Proudly Serving the Airport Industry for 30 Years

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Summer madness

Editor, Joe Bates, reflects on the busy summer months for air travel and the ‘passenger facilitation’ theme of this issue.



Airports in the Northern Hemisphere are now enjoying their busiest season of the year as hundreds of millions of people across the globe jet off on their summer holidays.

In the UK alone it is predicted that 30 million passengers will board outbound flights from one of the country’s airports in July and August.

While in the US, the TSA has reported that it screened a record-breaking 18.7 million travellers over the extended Fourth of July holiday period, and it expects a typically hectic summer of air travel.

Such huge numbers inevitably put extra strain on airport facilities and staff as they struggle to cope with demand during these crazily busy few months.

New processes and procedures often don’t help matters, like the roll-out of the EU’s digital Entry-Exit System (EES) currently causing severe bottlenecks at airports across the continent.

Indeed, the need for non-EU travellers to register their fingerprints and a photo via standalone kiosks on arrival has led to wait times at some airports taking hours instead of minutes.

You can read more about what airports can learn from the EES experience and how they can better prepare for future operational challenges in the next issue of *Airport World*.

I have always thought of the great getaway and all the frenzied activity around it, including the battle for a cab at the airport or trying to find a table in a crowded restaurant, as part and parcel of the madness of summer travel.

It is nothing new, of course, but undoubtedly it gets more difficult to manage each year as passenger numbers grow and existing facilities near their capacity.

Fortunately, airports are only too aware of what the summer peak period involves, and many prepare for it months in advance. This could involve anything from drafting plans to bring in extra staff and ensuring they make maximise use of their facilities to opening new infrastructure.

Arguably, this is when passenger facilitation needs to be at its best to optimise passenger journeys through the airport and provide visitors with the services and facilities they need, to make the airport experience a good one.

As you would expect in this ‘passenger facilitation’ themed issue of your favourite airport magazine, we cover a host of ways airports are enhancing the airport experience ranging from embracing new technology to sleeping accommodation at airports.

Cracking the passenger code; retail/F&B innovation; hotels and sleep pods; agentic AI; Frankfurt Airport’s dynamic new Terminal 3; and Saudi Arabia’s airport vision are addressed in the themed section of the magazine.

Elsewhere in the issue we have features about planning for the unexpected; Queen Alia’s Smart Cleaning System and robotic cleaning technology; and the potential impact of the decision to abolish upward-only rent on the non-aeronautical revenue of UK airports.

Our main airport feature is on ever ambitious Hong Kong International Airport, where we discover more about its ongoing growth and development.

If that’s not enough we also have articles about the design and construction of Bhutan’s Gelephu International Airport; sustainability; and the recent ‘Making AI Work in Airports’ webinar hosted by the Egremont Group in partnership with *Airport World*.

We round the issue out with our usual ‘people matters’ column and airport supplier news and features on the ‘business exchange’ pages.



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Portland International Airport's impressive new terminal.
Image courtesy of Ema Peter Photography/
ZGF Architects.

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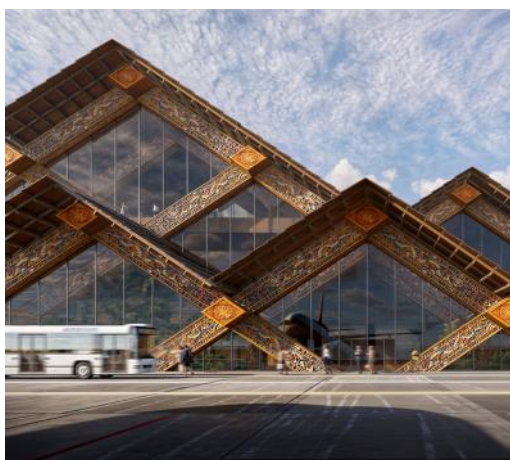
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Milestone year

Editor, Joe Bates, discovers more about the ongoing growth and development of Hong Kong International Airport.

Even by its own high standards, it's been a busy and successful year to date for Hong Kong International Airport, which has seen it open new infrastructure, record close to a 13% upturn in passengers and build on its commitment to becoming the world's greenest airport.

The May opening of its expanded and technology smart Terminal 2, which now covers a colossal 3.2 million-square-feet, has effectively raised the airport's capacity to around 100 million passengers per annum.

The total means that the \$1.65 billion (HK\$12.8 billion) upgrade, carried out as part of Airport Authority Hong Kong's Three Runway System (3RS) project – the third runway was commissioned in 2022 – has increased the gateway's annual capacity by some 30 million passengers.

And things are expected to get even better late next year when the airport opens its new T2 Concourse (T2C), which will allow the terminal to handle both arriving and departing passengers, and most importantly mean that departing travellers no longer need to take an Automated People Mover to Terminal 1 to board flights.

Theoretically, this development and other ongoing infrastructure and technology enhancements will raise the long-term capacity of HKG – more commonly referred to as HKIA by the airport authority – to up to 120 million passengers per annum.

Early feedback from both passengers and the airlines show that HKIA's new Terminal 2 has transformed the Departures experience for passengers boarding flights to mostly regional destinations.

AAHK CEO, Vivian Cheung, told *Airport World*: “Since the opening of T2 departures, we have received very positive feedback from both passengers and airline partners.

“Travellers – particularly younger, tech-savvy passengers – have highlighted the speed, convenience, and seamlessness of the check-in experience.

“Airlines have also noted smoother operations and improved passenger flow, contributing to overall efficiency within the terminal.

“Fifteen airlines are operating short-haul and regional routes in T2, which is expected to serve eight million departing passengers during its first 12 months of operation.

“Complementing T1's long-haul and transfer/transit services, T2 is designed with a strong focus on smart and technology-enabled services for leisure and regional travel.

“Together, the two terminals strengthen HKIA's capacity to meet growing passenger demand while enhancing passenger experience.”

She continues: “T2 incorporates thoughtfully designed, user-centric features.

“The bright, spacious, and modern design of the terminal further enhances comfort, creating a more relaxed and pleasant pre-flight environment.

“The centrally located e-security gates shorten the journey into the airside area, enabling passengers – particularly those without



baggage – to proceed quickly without walking through all the check-in counters before entering the security checkpoint.

“The ultra-low baggage belt platform at bag drop counters makes the process more accessible for passengers of all ages.

“In addition, the terminal features advanced automation and self-service technologies, including facial recognition, smart check-in, express bag drop.

“These innovations enable passengers to complete their departure processes in as little as five to seven minutes, significantly improving efficiency and reducing queue times.

“Furthermore, the wide variety of retail and food and beverage offerings, including a number of outlets that operate round the clock, has further improved the overall airport experience, providing greater choice and convenience for passengers at any time of day.

“Together, these enhancements reinforce our commitment to delivering a smarter, faster, and more enjoyable airport journey for all.”

TRAFFIC TRENDS

Hong Kong International Airport handled 61 million passengers in 2025, 15% up on the previous year but still quite a way below the record 74.6 million it handled in 2018 and 71.5 million it welcomed in pre-COVID 2019.

Last year's improved performance was achieved on the back of a strong Christmas peak season which saw the gateway accommodate more than 200,000 passenger a day for eight days in December.

Annual aircraft movements increased by 8.7% compared to 2024, reaching 394,730 during the year, while yearly cargo throughput saw a 2.7% growth to 5.07 million tonnes.

Recently released figures for its fiscal year ending March 31, 2026, show a double digit increase in passengers to 63 million, while cargo volumes rose by 2.7% to 5.1 million tonnes and aircraft movements by 7.1% to 399,450.

So, how have traffic numbers held up so far this year and what are the expectations for traffic growth in 2026?

“We have enjoyed a good start to 2026 with passenger volumes up by around 13%, aircraft movements increasing by 4.8% and cargo by 3.6% during the first five months of the year,” enthuses Cheung.

“We are on track to welcome around 70 million passengers in 2026, supported by continued recovery in flight capacity and strong travel demand.

“Overall, performance in the first half of the year is in line with our expectations, and we are confident of achieving our growth targets for both passenger and cargo traffic.”

The airport's traffic figures for May show that it handled 5.34 million passengers, 33,655 aircraft movements and 435,000 tonnes of cargo during the month – representing year-on-year growth of 10.2%, 3.6% and 3% respectively.

According to AAHK, passenger growth in May was supported by a double-digit increase in transfer/transit passengers.

By region, most markets expanded in May, with growth led by Mainland China, Japan and Southeast Asia.

Overall cargo growth was primarily driven by transshipments, followed by imports, which recorded year-on-year increases of 23.2% and 1.2% respectively.

ROUTE DEVELOPMENT

HKIA's route network was recently boosted by the return of non-stop Delta Air Lines services between Hong Kong and Los Angeles (LAX) after an eight-year hiatus.

Delta states that its new daily service reconnects Los Angeles with “one of Asia's most important markets with its premier US West Coast gateway”.



Other new services launched this year have included Cathay Pacific resuming operations to Seattle (SEA); HK Express inaugurating flights to Wuxi in Mainland China; Sun PhuQuoc Airways commencing operations to Phu Quoc Island in Vietnam and Hong Kong Airlines launching a new route to Lanzhou on the mainland.

Last year's numbers ensured that HKG was the 24th busiest airport in the world for passenger traffic and the eleventh busiest in Asia-Pacific.

When it comes to cargo, however, HKIA is the undisputed No.1 in the world, a position it has held in ACI World's annual global cargo rankings every year since 2010, with the notable exception of COVID impacted 2020.

CARGO POWERHOUSE

The airport's prime location with access to Mainland China's manufacturing base, expansive route network and ground connections, some of the world's most technologically advanced cargo terminals/logistics facilities, and trade encouraging local government policies ensure a constant stream of cargo through HKG.

Indeed, the five million plus tonnes of cargo processed across the airport site in 2025 meant that it handled around a million tonnes more freight last year than second ranked Shanghai Pudong (PVG) to strengthen its position as the world's biggest cargo hub.

Cheung notes: "We were greatly honoured to retain our position as the world's busiest cargo airport in 2025 for the 15th time since 2010.

"Thanks to the collective efforts of the air cargo community and strong support from various government departments, we continue to expand our capacity and enhance capability in handling high-value cargoes, e-commerce fulfilment, and cross-boundary transshipments, all being strategic and high growth segments.

"Facing intense competition in the region and global economic uncertainties, we are redoubling our efforts to sharpen competitiveness and open new horizons for our cargo business."

AAHK is quick to note that it has continued to roll out new initiatives to strengthen its air cargo capabilities.

UPS, for example, began construction of its new hub at the airport in March 2026, which will be capable of handling nearly one million tonnes of cargo annually upon completion in 2028.

To enhance cross-boundary transshipment efficiency, the Air-Land Fresh Lane – jointly established by AAHK in collaboration with authorities of Hong Kong and Guangdong in 2025 – streamlines customs procedures to enable premium perishables received at HKG to reach major cities in the Greater Bay Area within hours.

Meanwhile, the HKIA Dongguan Logistics Park has handled cargo valued at over RMB70 billion since the launch of its pilot scheme, with its first phase permanent facilities now under development and expected to raise its annual handling capacity to beyond one million tonnes upon full operation.

Complementing physical and process enhancements, AAHK adds that it is also pioneering the digitalisation of the air cargo supply chain with a view to further enhancing efficiency and enabling value-added services.

Initiatives include the award-winning one-stop digital platforms 'HKIA Cargo Data Platform' and 'HKIA Cargo Connect' which facilitate partnerships through innovative, intelligent and interconnected digital ecosystems, unlocking new business and collaboration opportunities.

SUSTAINABILITY

In 2012, AAHK pledged to make Hong Kong International Airport the 'World's Greenest Airport', and Cheung insists that the airport remains as committed to this ambition today as it did when it made the announcement 14 years ago.

She says: "Sustainability has always been at the core of HKIA's development and a central pillar of our long-term strategy.



“Since 2010, we have worked closely with our airport business partners to reduce carbon emissions across the entire airport community. In 2021 we joined forces with key aviation partners to commit to achieving Net Zero Carbon Emissions by 2050, alongside an interim target to reduce absolute emissions by 55% by 2035 compared with 2018 levels.

“Recognising that sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) is a key initiative for reducing carbon emissions in the aviation sector, AAHK supports and promotes the uplift of SAF at Hong Kong International Airport.

“We have also completed a comprehensive study on the use of SAF in Hong Kong which developed a range of strategic options to promote SAF uptake for consideration by the HKSAR Government.

“Beyond carbon reduction, we are focused on enhancing biodiversity, particularly given HKIA’s unique location on Hong Kong’s western waters.

“In 2024, in collaboration with the HKSAR Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, we established the North Lantau Marine Park – the largest marine park in Hong Kong – to strengthen the conservation of Chinese white dolphins and protect the marine ecosystem in North Lantau waters.

“In parallel, we have implemented a range of proactive marine enhancement initiatives. These include deploying artificial reefs and oyster reefs in the waters around HKIA, as well as releasing juvenile fish and around one million shrimp fry to support marine biodiversity and fisheries resources.

“We also organise eco-tours in Hong Kong’s western waters for students and stakeholders to promote environmental awareness.

“Taken together, these ongoing initiatives – spanning carbon management, ecological conservation and community engagement – are enabling HKIA to make meaningful progress towards its ambition of becoming one of the world’s greenest airports.”

For the record, HKIA has achieved Level 4 ‘Transformation’ status in ACI’s Airport Carbon Accreditation programme, and contributed to the

development of the Levels 4, 4+ and 5 of ACA by supporting ACI APAC & Middle East in conducting a consultancy study on developing a climate adaptation approach for the region.

While its industry leading annual Sustainability Report – the next one of which is due for publication this summer – showcases AAHK’s progress on 24 strategic goals across four sustainability pillars, namely Environmental Excellence, Operational Excellence, Thriving Economies and Societies, and Thriving People.

Another sustainability high worthy of note is HKG’s Platinum Award in this year’s ACI Asia-Pacific & Middle East annual Green Airports Recognition programme for its robust approach to adapting to climate change and ensuring the airport’s flood resilience.

AAHK undertook extensive seawall and drainage studies for the entire airport island, which incorporated worst-case climate scenarios and involved sophisticated hydrodynamic modelling to assess HKIA’s resilience to flood risks.

And the studies not only confirmed that HKIA’s existing infrastructure is resilient until at least mid-century and operational at the end of the century with adaptation measures in place, but also enabled more effective flood management strategies for HKG.

SKYTOPIA

Last year AAHK stated that a key goal going forward for the gateway was to “press full steam ahead with its Airport City development under the newly unveiled SKYTOPIA brand”, and it has done just that, achieving several major goals this year.

Cheung says: “We have spearheaded and driven forward all the key projects of SKYTOPIA since its launch, with several important milestones already achieved this year.

“Among these, AAHK has signed the contract for the development and operation of the Art & Valuables Storage Facility, which is scheduled to commence operations in early 2027.



“AAHK has also initiated an Expression of Interest exercise to engage leading global industry players for the Yacht Bay project. In parallel, trials are underway for the first phase of the autonomous transportation system for the Airport City.

“Looking ahead, 2028 will mark a significant phase of delivery. The Yacht Bay facilities will be completed in stages starting from 2028, while the 20,000-seat performance areas at AsiaWorld-Expo Phase 2 is targeted for completion in the same year.

“In addition, the autonomous transportation system that will link SKYTOPIA with the nearby mass transit railway station will also be completed in 2028.”

The Yacht Bay is set to become Asia’s new premier nautical destination featuring three key water-themed projects, namely the Airport Bay Marina, Marine Resort, and Water Recreation Area.

The Airport Bay Marina will be Hong Kong’s largest facility of its kind providing 500 berths for vessels up to 100 metres long.

The Marine Resort will comprise a hotel development with direct marina access and a lively promenade dotted with diverse dining and leisure options.

The Yacht Bay will also house Hong Kong’s largest aquatic entertainment and water recreation area that will host a wide range of activities for visitors of all ages.

According to AAHK, the Yacht Bay enjoys synergy with SKYTOPIA’s offerings in entertainment, art, convention and exhibition, food and beverages, tourism and more.

Cheung adds: “These developments underscore our commitment to realising SKYTOPIA as a world class destination that integrates air travel with entertainment and waterfront leisure.”

NEVER ENDING STORY

Like at most major hubs, the need to upgrade HKIA’s infrastructure to raise capacity, become more operationally efficient and enhance facilities for both passengers and its airline customers is a never-ending story.

In the case of HKIA, the project to reclaim land from the sea for its third runway has meant that major construction work has been going on across the airport site for more than a decade.

Will the opening of the T2 Concourse effectively spell the end of this phase of the development of the airport’s key aviation facilities or is there more to come?

Cheung says: “Subject to passenger demand, the T2 Concourse (T2C), located near the new Third Runway, is expected to commence operations in 2027.

“T2C’s opening will be accompanied by a new Automated People Mover and Baggage Handling System linking T2C with T2, while T2’s arrivals facilities will come into operation – completing its transformation into a full-service terminal.

“T2 and T2C have been planned with flexibility to expand in line with demand, supporting the Three-runway System’s (3RS) capacity of handling 120 million passengers and 10 million tonnes of cargo annually.

“Beyond the 3RS, development will continue through HKIA’s Airport City vision. In particular, SKYTOPIA represents the next phase, leveraging the airport’s land and marine assets to deliver a mix of commercial, cultural and leisure developments.

“This will further strengthen HKIA’s role – not only as a leading aviation hub, but also as a destination in its own right.”

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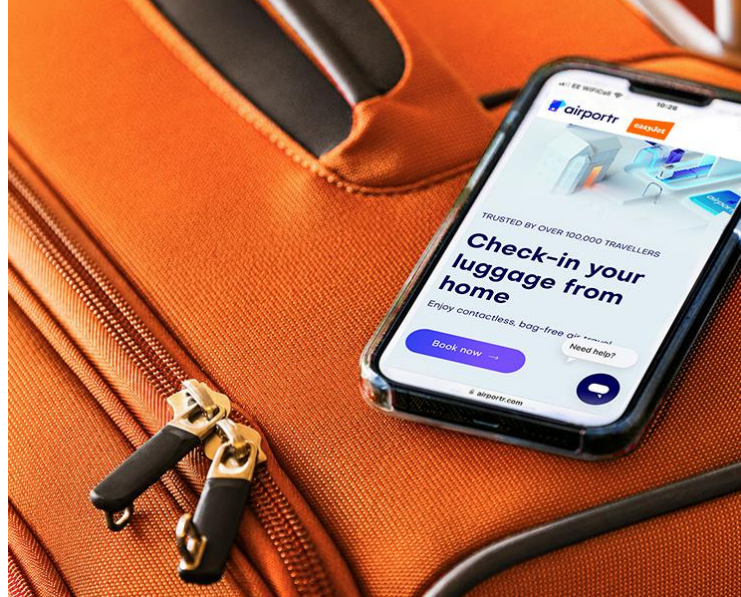
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Making headlines

We take a look at four very different initiatives that are designed to improve passenger journeys and ease congestion in the terminal.

Airports continue to up their game in terms of passenger facilitation by introducing new facilities, technology and processes to make for smoother and more enjoyable journeys through their facilities.

From an autonomous wheelchair trial at London Heathrow and a new baggage collection service at Edinburgh to the opening of a remote check-in terminal for Boston Logan and robot assistance in Nuremberg, we round-up some of the latest passenger facilitation initiatives at airports across the globe.

AUTONOMOUS WHEELCHAIR TRIAL AT HEATHROW

WHILL, Inc. has launched a trial of its Autonomous Service at London's Heathrow Airport, which enables travellers with mobility issues to navigate their way through Terminal 3 by using any of its self-driving wheelchairs.

All of its wheelchairs are equipped with mobility technology such as advanced sensors and autonomous navigation systems.

WHILL notes that the deployment, delivered in partnership with ABM, represents another important milestone in its mission to improve accessibility, operational efficiency, and traveller independence through advanced autonomous mobility technology.

Users of the service simply have to select their destination through a touchscreen interface on the wheelchair and then sit back and enjoy the ride while the device safely transports them through the terminal. Once the journey is completed, the device autonomously returns to its home location.

"As global travel continues to grow, airports are increasingly looking for innovative ways to improve accessibility while supporting operational efficiency," notes Matthias Pape, vice president for business development at WHILL Autonomous Service EMEA.

"Launching a trial at Heathrow Airport with ABM represents another significant step in expanding our global autonomous mobility network and bringing greater freedom, confidence, and convenience to travellers around the world."

The trial builds on WHILL's continued momentum within the aviation industry, where the company's Autonomous Service is now operating at 26 airports and facilities globally, between them providing more than one million autonomous rides worldwide in 2025.

In addition to improving the traveller experience, WHILL notes that its service help airports and PRM service providers to optimise mobility operations by reducing manual wheelchair return logistics, improving fleet visibility, and enabling staff to focus on higher-touch passenger support.

HOME BAGGAGE COLLECTION FOR EASYJET PASSENGERS AT EDINBURGH AIRPORT

Travel technology company Airportr has partnered with Edinburgh Airport and easyJet to introduce its service that allows departing passengers to have their luggage collected from home or hotel and delivered directly to the aircraft.

Available in time for the busy summer holidays, Airportr's door-to-flight service gives easyJet customers travelling from Edinburgh the option to check in their luggage from home, skip bag drop on departure and, when travelling to Geneva, have their bags delivered from their flight to their final destination.

By giving passengers the option to arrive at the airport without luggage, Edinburgh Airport can ease pressure on landside areas, reduce queue lengths at check-in, and gain greater control over passenger flows during peak, high-volume periods.



For an airport that handled a record 16.9 million passengers in 2025 (including 61,636 on a single day in July), with peak-summer days expected to repeatedly surpass last year's busiest figures throughout the 2026 season, this is a significant operational advantage.

"We're always looking at ways to make travel easier for our passengers, and this new service from easyJet and Airporth does exactly that," says Peter Barnes, chief operating officer at Edinburgh Airport.

"Being the first airport in Scotland to offer home luggage collection gives passengers even more choice and convenience, particularly during the busy summer period when many people are heading away on holiday."

Around 67% of Airporth customers say the ability to avoid carrying heavy luggage through the airport was the primary reason for choosing the service.

"Our ongoing, successful partnership with easyJet has demonstrated that door-to-flight and flight-to-door baggage service provides passengers with a level of convenience and peace of mind they find highly desirable as a part of their travel experience," said Ultan O'Brien, Airporth's chief revenue officer.

NEW REMOTE TERMINAL FOR BOSTON LOGAN

Boston Logan passengers on select Delta Air Lines and JetBlue flights can now check in, drop their bags, and clear TSA security in Framingham, Massachusetts, before they ever reach the airport.

The Logan Airport Remote Terminal at Framingham, opened in early June by the Massachusetts Port Authority (Massport), is the first off-airport security checkpoint in North America. SITA's common-use check-in technology is the platform that makes it work.

Talking about the new facility, Massport CEO, Rich Davey, said: "The Remote Terminal pilot programme is part of Massport's broader vision to reimagine the travel experience and make the passenger journey more seamless, connected, and efficient.

"Passengers in and around Metro West now have a new, low-stress way to reach Boston Logan. Imagine arriving at the airport having already checked in and cleared security and then being dropped off just steps



from your gate. This is the kind of stress-free process we're working to make a reality for everyone."

The Landline Company, a third-party contractor, is partnering with Massport to help manage the programme.

Landline runs a similar bus service between airports in Pennsylvania and Illinois, but this will be the first programme in the US to offer service from a remote terminal directly to an airport.

"For decades the industry has measured airport capacity in gates and runways, but the real bottleneck at most major hubs lives before you ever see a plane," notes Shawn Gregor, president for SITA Americas.

"The check-ins, the bag drops, and the security line are where we see most passenger anxiety. What Massport has done in Framingham is move those friction points twenty miles upstream, reducing the pressure on the airport facilities and passengers' anxiety levels.

"Once you can do that, the airport itself gets meaningfully bigger without adding a single square foot."

NUREMBERG AIRPORT'S ROBOTIC ASSISTANT

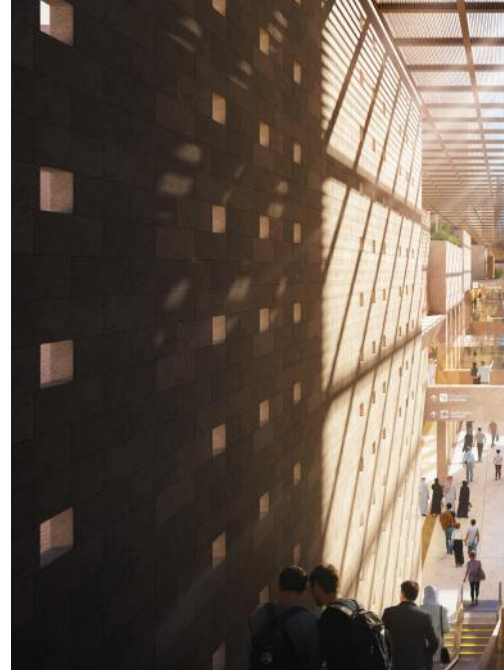
In collaboration with the Fraunhofer Institute for Integrated Circuits IIS, Nuremberg Airport has tested the ability of a mobile, AI-based robot to help travellers on their journey through the German gateway.

The robot successfully answered questions ranging from the location of parking, restaurants, and check-in counters at the airport, and seemed to pass the test of whether the travelling public would be willing to accept the help of a humanoid assistant.

And it was able to do so in multiple languages as an edge AI solution, without cloud access.

"AI experts at Fraunhofer IIS in Nuremberg have developed a robot that serves as an autonomous information assistant," enthused Christian Albrecht, head of corporate communications at Nuremberg Airport.

"As a company rooted in the region, we are very pleased to be a partner. We offer Fraunhofer IIS a platform to gain practical experience and provide our guests with an exceptional, innovative information experience."



Saudi Arabia's airport vision

The Kingdom's strategy is designed for growth, connectivity and enhancing the customer experience, writes John Reavy, Mott MacDonald's aviation director for the Middle East.

A viation is at the heart of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's ambition for growth and a more diversified economy.

Indeed, it is essential for regional connectivity across Saudi Arabia's vast geography, domestic and international tourism and trade.

Launched in 2022, the Saudi National Aviation Strategy sets out plans to strengthen air transport through modernisation of airport infrastructure across the country, the launch of a new national carrier Riyadh Air, and the development of King Salman International Airport, a mega project in Riyadh.

Sitting between Europe, Asia and Africa, the aim is for Saudi Arabia to become a global aviation hub, serving 330 million passengers annually.

As a central driver of Vision 2030, aviation will also help to spread the benefits of growth and economic diversification across the country through better regional connectivity.

To support these ambitions, significant investment will be directed towards Saudi Arabia's largest international airports, particularly in Riyadh and Jeddah.

Modernisation of the Kingdom's wider network of international and regional airports will focus more on improving operational efficiency and passenger experience within the same airport footprint.

Core planning priorities at these airports will be movement of passengers, increasing processing capacity and making busy airports feel less congested.

DESIGNING FOR GROWTH

Meeting growing demand, while maintaining operational efficiency, is one of the main challenges facing Saudi Arabia's airport network.

As a result, there is a focus on right sizing airports for a five-to ten-year growth period without over-investment. Plans and designs need to be pragmatic, delivering value while retaining flexibility for future expansion.

Saudi Arabia's airports were originally designed using a standardised model, which established a consistent baseline for infrastructure and operations across a wide network.

That standardised model is a good base for phased expansion across multiple airports, where modules can be added to existing airport footprint in phases, helping to upgrade the airports quickly, cost-effectively and keeping consistency.

Peak demand during events like the FIFA World Cup 2034 or Expo 2030 Riyadh will need to be managed through operational efficiency without adding excess capacity.

Faster, more predictable aircraft turnarounds could help airports optimise existing infrastructure.

Video analytics can monitor the turnaround process, identify deviations from plan and improve departure reliability. Greater predictability allows airports to reduce the time between arriving and departing aircraft, helping them to add capacity or manage peak demand more effectively.

IMPROVING THE PASSENGER EXPERIENCE

As airports handle more people within constrained footprints, passenger flow has a greater impact on capacity and customer satisfaction.



Advances in CT scanning are transforming hand baggage screening, helping security teams to identify the right bags to inspect more quickly. This, as we all know, will enable more people and bags to flow through security per hour.

Airports can also derive great value from the data generated by smart systems supporting passenger and aircraft processes.

Analysis of security operations can improve the performance of security lanes and, potentially, reduce the number of lanes required. It's an example of how a process improvement can free up space for passenger amenities, food and beverage areas or retail outlets.

Large LED screens are becoming an integral part of the modern airport experience, improving passenger communication and wayfinding.

Delivering flight information either via digital apps or big screens, rather than making passengers search for it, creates a more relaxed and enjoyable journey.

To maximise the value of digital channels, airports need to balance passenger information, entertainment, support for retail and revenue generation.

TURNING DATA INTO OPERATIONAL INSIGHT

As tourism expands across the Kingdom, airports will need to use data more effectively to forecast and manage demand.

It will be particularly important as more large groups and tour operators travel via regional airports beyond Riyadh and Jeddah.

Integrating data from all stakeholders in an airport can improve understanding of passenger and cargo demand, helping operators to allocate resources more effectively and avoid overwhelming smaller airports.

Accurate demand forecasting depends as much on data quality and accessibility as it does on technology, such as machine learning. Bringing passenger, baggage, cargo and aircraft data together in a

single data lake enables more effective analysis, compared with fragmented data spread across multiple systems and silos.

In Saudi Arabia, predicting the pace of growth in international tourism and the impact on cargo transportation will be challenging. But this is what will be required to match demand and capacity.

Regional airports will need to manage higher passenger volumes and demand for imported goods to serve new regional resorts, while continuing to support exports of local produce and manufactured goods.

A SENSE OF IDENTITY

As domestic and international tourism grows, the Kingdom's airports will help to shape first impressions of new destinations.

In April this year, Saudi authorities gave approval for the first international airport in the holy city of Mecca (officially known as Makkah al-Mukarramah), improving access for visitors taking part in the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimage.

Design and operational planning for the new airport needs to be shaped by the spiritual needs of travellers, creating a meaningful and seamless journey.

Other regional airports beyond Riyadh and Jeddah will increasingly serve as gateways to heritage sites, luxury beach resorts and mountain and desert experiences.

Architecture offers an opportunity to showcase local identity, landscapes and cultural heritage. Traditional geometric patterns and shading strategies using native plant canopies can create distinctive passenger experiences.

A great example of this is Medina airport, where the roof and internal canopy are inspired by its famous date palm orchards, giving it a striking and memorable feel.

By hiding the complexity of airport operations behind well-designed experiences, airports can create journeys that feel efficient and welcoming to Saudi nationals and a new generation of global travellers.

AW



Cracking the code

Gresham Smith's Wilson Rayfield explains why getting every detail right in airport design matters when it comes to the passenger experience.

Airports occupy a unique intersection of infrastructure, hospitality, and civic identity. Travellers pass through them during moments defined by anticipation, urgency, and often stress.

Some passengers move confidently through terminals every week; others may be flying for the first time ever. Despite these differences, most travellers want the same thing – a journey that feels predictable, clear, and under control.

Delivering that experience is more complex than it appears. Passenger satisfaction rarely hinges on a single dramatic feature or signature amenity.

Instead, it comes from the cumulative impact of dozens of interconnected decisions such as circulation paths, lighting levels, restroom conditions, acoustics, seating layouts, signage clarity, concessions, and landside access, including parking, drop-off, rideshare, and rental car return.

When these elements align, travel feels seamless. When even one fails, frustration escalates quickly.

Understanding how these moments compound across the passenger journey has become increasingly important as airports face evolving travel patterns, broader passenger demographics, and rising expectations.

The challenge is not simply designing a terminal building but orchestrating an experience that works from the gateway to the gate and beyond.

THE PASSENGER JOURNEY AS A SYSTEM

Airports are often discussed in terms of amenities like restaurants, retail, lounges, and public art. But passengers rarely experience these features individually. Instead, they perceive a continuous sequence of moments shaped by decisions about layout, circulation, and comfort.

From the first roadway sign to the final baggage carousel, every step contributes to the overall impression. Wayfinding, security screening, hold rooms, concessions, restrooms, and circulation routes aim to function as a co-ordinated system rather than isolated components.

When the journey flows logically, passengers move through the terminal with confidence. When it does not, confusion and anxiety build quickly.

Predictability is particularly important for frequent travellers who depend on efficiency and familiarity. Yet it is equally important for occasional travellers who may find airport procedures unfamiliar.

In both cases, passengers are looking for reassurance that they are in the right place and that their trip is progressing as expected.

Decision points – such as choosing between concourses or confirming a gate – become critical moments where clarity reinforces confidence. Within that journey, certain moments carry more emotional weight than others.

ANXIETY AT CRITICAL TOUCHPOINTS

Two stages consistently generate the greatest passenger anxiety: passing through security and confirming the correct departure gate.



Security screening represents the most uncertain phase of the journey. Passengers often approach it without knowing how long the line will be or whether they have complied with every regulation.

Long waits or unclear procedures can quickly heighten stress, particularly for infrequent travellers. Once passengers' clear security, the emotional tone of the journey often shifts. Anxiety drops, and they begin to relax.

The second pivotal moment occurs when passengers confirm their gate location. Many head there immediately, even when they have time to spare, to verify that everything is proceeding as planned.

Seeing the aircraft at the gate or the boarding area filling with passengers provides reassurance that the trip remains on track.

Once these checkpoints are resolved, behaviour changes noticeably. Travellers who feel oriented and secure are more willing to spend money, resulting in exploring the terminal, engaging with its amenities, or beginning to relax into the trip ahead.

Yet reassurance alone cannot compensate for environments that feel uncomfortable or poorly organised.

CONGESTION, SCALE, AND THE HUMAN FACTOR

Designing airport space requires balancing two competing conditions: congestion and emptiness.

Terminals that feel overcrowded can frustrate passengers and slow circulation. Yet spaces that feel unusually empty can create uncertainty.

Passengers instinctively read spatial cues. A crowded concourse suggests inefficiency, while a space that feels oversized or underused may cause travellers to question whether they are in the correct place.

Human behaviour further complicates the equation. Travellers move at different speeds, carry different luggage, and navigate terminals in groups of varying sizes. Effective circulation design aims to

allow passengers to move comfortably around one another without creating bottlenecks.

Right-sizing, therefore, requires more than theoretical capacity calculations. Project team leaders seek to account for how people move, pause, and gather within the terminal environment, while also considering how to react to events outside their control, such as TSA staffing shortages in the US or rare security breaches that can force entire concourses back through screening.

While circulation shapes movement, smaller details often determine how passengers judge the experience.

THE INVISIBLE POWER OF BASICS

Some of the most influential elements of passenger experience are also the least glamorous. Restrooms, seating comfort, lighting quality, temperature control, and acoustics often shape impressions more than iconic architectural features.

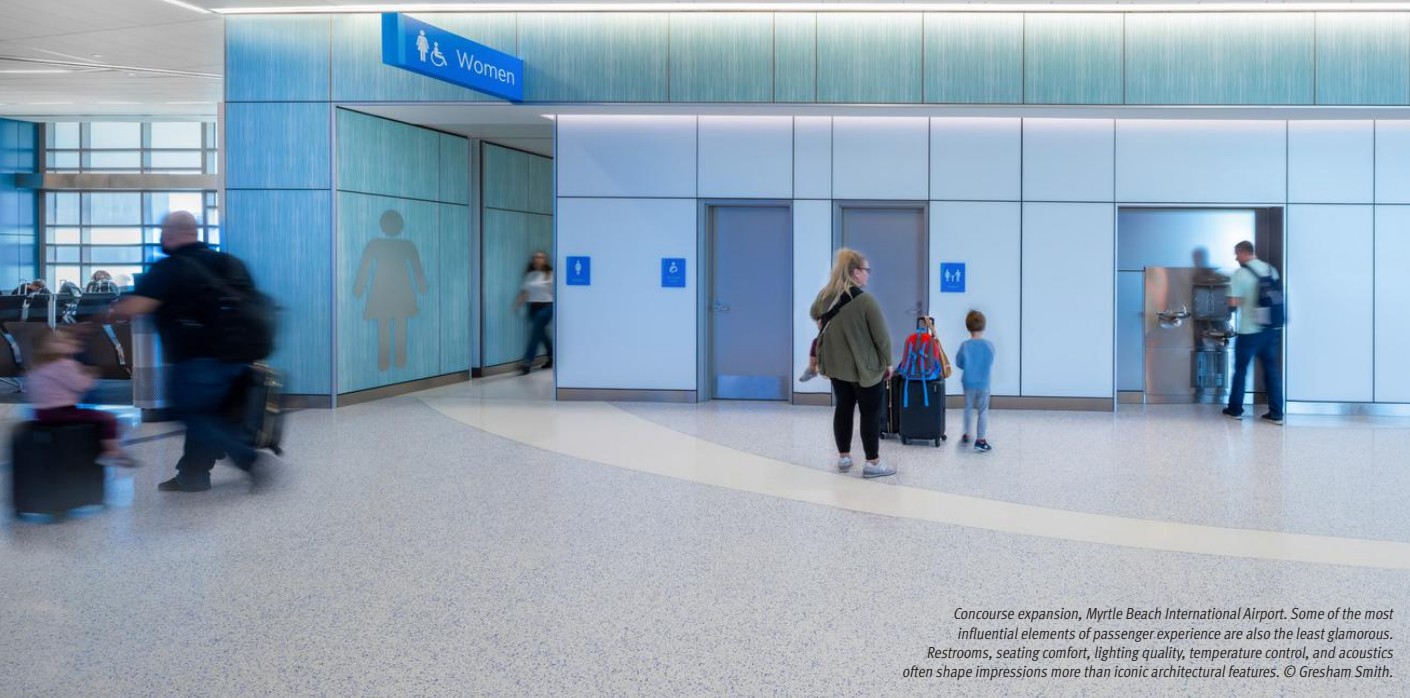
A clean restroom can reinforce confidence in an entire facility, while a poorly maintained one can overshadow otherwise successful design investments.

Similarly, uncomfortable seating or excessive noise can turn waiting time into frustration.

Seating layouts illustrate how subtle decisions affect usability. Smaller seats may increase seat counts, but passengers often avoid sitting close to strangers. In practice, fewer but larger seats can achieve higher utilisation because travellers feel more comfortable using them.

Just as important is providing a variety of seating and spaces from family-friendly zones near children's play areas to quieter work-oriented settings that appeal to business travellers.

Material selection also influences perception. Hard flooring surfaces amplify the sound of rolling luggage and foot traffic.



Concourse expansion, Myrtle Beach International Airport. Some of the most influential elements of passenger experience are also the least glamorous. Restrooms, seating comfort, lighting quality, temperature control, and acoustics often shape impressions more than iconic architectural features. © Gresham Smith.

Many contemporary terminals address this by incorporating quieter flooring systems and softer materials in waiting areas.

These decisions – lighting levels, furniture scale, durable high-capacity seating, refreshable finishes like carpet, and material textures – collectively shape whether an airport feels calm and welcoming or chaotic and impersonal.

Beyond comfort, airports must also communicate a sense of identity.

THE CHALLENGE OF SUBJECTIVE DECISIONS

Airport design involves two types of decisions. Some, like calculating gate capacity, determining hold room size, or meeting code requirements, are objective.

These issues can be addressed through engineering and planning. Others are subjective. How should the terminal reflect its region? What materials or imagery best represent a city or state? What atmosphere should greet arriving passengers?

Without a shared vision early in the process, these questions can lead to delays or inconsistent outcomes. Successful projects, therefore, establish a guiding design ethos from the outset.

When teams agree on a concept rooted in regional identity or cultural narrative, it becomes easier to evaluate decisions and maintain consistency.

Meanwhile, changes in travel patterns are reshaping the expectations airports must meet.

A CHANGING PASSENGER PROFILE

Passenger demographics have shifted significantly in recent years. Leisure travel has grown, and low-cost carriers have expanded air travel access to new groups of passengers.

This shift has widened the range of expectations airports must meet. Frequent business travellers often navigate terminals quickly and efficiently, while occasional travellers may approach airports with greater sensitivity to pricing, signage clarity, and unfamiliar procedures.

Airports must therefore create environments that accommodate both experienced travellers and first-time flyers.

DESIGNING FOR TRUST

Airports shape how travellers perceive a city or region. For visitors, they are often the first encounter with a place. For residents, they serve as gateways to the wider world.

Passenger experience ultimately functions like a complex combination lock. Every element matters.

When each piece aligns, from signage and circulation to lighting, concessions, parking, and restrooms, the journey feels intuitive and dependable. When even one element fails, the entire system can falter.

For airport leaders and designers alike, the insight is clear. A successful passenger experience is not about a single memorable feature.

It is about cracking the code of the passenger experience by orchestrating hundreds of decisions in close collaboration with airport clients so effectively that travellers rarely notice the design itself, only the confidence that their journey is unfolding exactly as it ought.

About the author

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3

The Next Gen Security Check-list

- ☒ New Equipment
- ☐ New CONOPS
- ☐ New Procedures
- ☐ New Training
- ☐ New Data
- ☐ New Compliance Requirements
- ☐ New Levels of Performance

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We are the breakthrough transformation people.



Buy and fly

We review the opening of some new retail and F&B outlets that have helped enhance the shopping and dining experience at airports this year.

The opportunity for airports to update, modify or even transform their retail and F&B outlets doesn't come along very often, so when it does, making the right choice for any new concession is crucial as it could impact on everything from customer satisfaction levels to commercial income.

New terminals or the extension of existing facilities, and the end of traditionally lengthy concessionaire contracts, arguably give airports the best opportunity to make the biggest changes and create something new, either with the existing providers or other retail/F&B partners.

We provide examples of both scenarios and showcase a couple of individual outlet openings in this article.

HIGH QUALITY OFFERINGS IN MUNICH'S NEW PIER

Munich Airport believes that its new T1 Pier for non-Schengen traffic introduces a new world of shopping, services and dining that plays a defining role in the overall travel experience.

The offering includes five new restaurants and 20 retail and service areas surrounding a central marketplace the airport hopes will stand out for its appealing atmosphere.

One of the key highlights is Munich Airport's first walk-through duty-free store. Located directly after security, it guides passengers through a curated retail space bringing together beauty, spirits and accessories.

A significant part of the retail offer is operated by eurotrade Flughafen München Handels GmbH, a subsidiary of Munich Airport.

"With the new eurotrade spaces in the T1 Pier, we are creating a shopping experience that is consistently designed from the passenger's perspective: easily accessible, high-quality and seamlessly integrated into the passenger flow," enthuses Sven Zahn, managing director of eurotrade Flughafen München Handels GmbH.

"The walk-through duty-free store is a strong signal for the continued development of travel retail at Munich Airport."

RETAIL SPACE REOPENS AT VILNIUS AIRPORT

Gebr. Heinemann subsidiary Travel Retail Vilnius (TRV) has reopened its fundamentally redesigned duty-free and travel value shop within the Schengen area of Vilnius Airport.

The reopening is closely linked to the airport's ongoing large-scale modernisation programme, which includes the launch of a new departure terminal, the reconstruction of existing terminal spaces, and the expansion of commercial areas to enhance the overall passenger experience.

A key element of this development is the creation of integrated retail environments within newly designed passenger flows, as Vilnius Airport adapts to growing passenger numbers and rising expectations regarding comfort, services and shopping opportunities.

The centrepiece is a new walk-through store in the Schengen area, covering 1,300 square metres, which is around 55% larger than the previous retail space. By the end of the year, TRV will also open its Non-Schengen-Shop.



PERTH UNVEILS CONCESSION REFRESH

Perth Airport has unveiled its refreshed T1 International retail and hospitality precinct, marking a major investment in the passenger experience as the gateway prepares to welcome in excess of 50,000 passengers a day during the winter school holidays.

The completion of a significant T1 International food, beverage and retail refresh has introduced 14 new and revitalised outlets across the terminal, delivering a stronger mix of dining, shopping, local produce, travel essentials and premium experiences for passengers.

The new precinct brings together global retail operators and leading local brands, with partners including Avolta, Lagardère AWPL, Delaware North, SSP, WHSmith and Smarte Carte helping deliver a more contemporary international terminal experience.

“Airports are often the first and last impression travellers have of a destination, and this refresh gives us the opportunity to showcase Western Australia in a stronger way,” noted Kate Holsgrove, the airport’s chief commercial and aviation officer.

“From local food and beverage operators to WA gifting, wine, design and hospitality, the precinct helps bring a stronger sense of place to the international passenger journey.”

MILESTONES ALL ROUND AT KIX

Kansai International Airport (KIX) has inaugurated the expanded and fully renovated international retail area of Terminal 1, marking the completion of an ambitious renovation project launched in 2021.

The new concessions area boasts 24 retail outlets that include luxury brands, speciality shops offering popular regional products, a variety of restaurants and Japan’s largest walk-through duty free shop.

The opening coincided with the 10th anniversary of Kansai Airports’ concession for KIX, and signalled the completion of the renovation of Terminal 1.

GIRAFFE LANDS IN EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Airport has opened a Giraffe restaurant and will also offer a takeaway service, Giraffe Stop, with a dedicated grab and go area allowing passengers to pick up freshly prepared food and snacks to enjoy on the move or take on board their flight.

The Scottish gateway’s chief commercial officer, Stephanie Wear, said: “We know people are hungry to travel and we want to cater for that. Bringing Giraffe to the airport adds to the strong family offer of food and drink options we have for passengers.

“With both a full-service restaurant and a convenient takeaway option, it gives passengers international cuisine with flexibility and choice – and full stomachs before heading off on that well-earned break.”

TRIBUTE TO BELFAST’S UNIQUE CULTURE

SSP Group has opened Flax & Soda, a new casual dining restaurant celebrating the best of Northern Ireland as part of Belfast International Airport’s £100 million investment programme.

In 2025, Belfast International Airport embarked on a five-year journey to transform passenger experiences, with SSP playing a significant role in improving the range of F&B outlets into a modern, passenger-friendly hub of dining options.

The final phase of F&B developments is expected to be completed later this year, including a brand new 300-cover premium bar and kitchen concept.

The airport’s chief commercial officer, Kate Sherry, said: “Flax and Soda is more than just a dining destination – it’s a tribute to the vibrant culture that makes Belfast and the entire region unique.”

AW



Digital first design

Sergio Colella, SITA's president for Europe, considers how Frankfurt Airport's new Terminal 3 is an example of the type of dynamic, common-use infrastructure airlines want to fit their changing business models.

As the UK revisits airport expansion and capacity constraints, similar challenges are being faced across Europe.

Indeed, the next phase of airport growth will depend not only on building new infrastructure, but on how effectively existing capacity is used.

Europe's next phase of airport growth will come from combining new infrastructure with smarter, more flexible operations that increase capacity without adding complexity. Frankfurt Airport Terminal 3 shows how this approach can be applied in practice.

Designed to handle up to 19 million passengers annually in its initial phase, Terminal 3 is one of the most significant airport developments in Europe in recent years. Its importance lies not only in the additional space it provides, but in how that space is designed to operate.

The terminal has been built around a digital-first design, common use infrastructure, and flexible operations that allow airports and airlines to use capacity more efficiently while improving the passenger journey.

BUILDING CAPACITY IN A CONSTRAINED ENVIRONMENT

Expanding airport capacity in the UK and across Europe is complex due to land limitations, regulatory requirements, and the need to keep airports running during construction.

Frankfurt Terminal 3 has been developed over more than two decades, with construction beginning in 2015. Its phased design allowed the airport to add capacity while continuing to operate existing terminals.

The terminal introduces three new piers and allows airlines to move out of Terminal 2 so it can be renovated and brought back into use later, without disrupting day-to-day operations. This approach adds capacity in a way that can adapt as airport operations change over time.

DESIGNED AROUND DIGITAL FLOW FROM THE START

Many airports across the UK and Europe still rely on infrastructure that was not originally designed for digital passenger processing. Terminal 3 has been designed from the outset to support digital passenger flows across the entire journey.

Common use infrastructure allows passengers to check in and drop bags regardless of airline, reducing reliance on fixed, airline-dedicated counters and enabling both airports and airlines to allocate space and staff dynamically.

This improves utilisation across the terminal and helps maintain a consistent passenger experience throughout the day.

Automated security, self-service processing, and digital passenger guidance are designed to work together as one system.



For airlines, operating in a common-use environment changes how capacity and the passenger experience are managed.

Instead of being tied to fixed check-in zones or peak-time counters, airlines can scale up or down using shared infrastructure as demand changes.

This reduces unused space, lowers the cost of managing dedicated facilities, and gives airlines and the airport greater control to shape a consistent passenger experience – without being constrained by where an airline happens to be located in the terminal.

This helps keep passengers moving and gives airport and airline teams more control over how capacity is used throughout the day.

HYBRID SELF-SERVICE THAT WORKS AT SCALE

Automation only improves the journey when passengers can use it easily and confidently. Terminal 3 combines self-service with staff support available at the same touchpoints, so passengers can get help without leaving the process.

Passengers who are comfortable can move through independently. Those who need support can get it immediately. At scale, this increases processing capacity while keeping the experience accessible for all passengers. It also makes it easier to manage changes, such as moving airlines between terminals.

CO-ORDINATING THE FULL AIRPORT ECOSYSTEM

Delivering a terminal of this scale requires systems, operations, and on-the-ground processes to work together.

SITA and CCM have supported this by deploying and integrating shared systems across the passenger journey, including check-in, bag drop, boarding, and seating areas.

This means the same infrastructure can be used by multiple airlines, and data can flow across each step of the journey to keep operations aligned.

The goal is a common-use environment that can adapt as demand changes.

This approach has been tested through large-scale trial operations involving around 8,000 volunteer passengers, allowing the airport to validate how the full journey works before opening.

FROM INFRASTRUCTURE TO IMPACT

For passengers, this approach reduces waiting times, makes each step easier to understand, and creates a more predictable journey.

For airports and airlines, shared digital infrastructure allows capacity to be used more efficiently without requiring more space, higher costs, or added operational complexity.

As airports in the UK and across Europe look to expand, the next real constraint on capacity will not be infrastructure alone, but how well passengers are able to interact with it.

Digital flow, intuitive self-service, and clear guidance increasingly determine whether capacity can be fully used.

When passengers move smoothly, infrastructure performs as designed. When they don't, even the newest terminal can quickly become a bottleneck.

Frankfurt Terminal 3 shows that future airport growth will depend not only on how much infrastructure is built, but on how effectively passengers can move through and interact with it.



Eliminating wait times

Agentic AI is set to change passenger journeys and the way airports and airlines operate, writes Chetan Dube.

The 80,000 plus complaints per year received by the US Department of Transportation about air travel just goes to show that aviation still has a lot of work to do to enhance the passenger experience.

Frustratingly for airports, the source of traveller dissatisfaction in the terminal is often beyond their control as it involves airline issues or government agencies responsible for security, immigration and customs.

Help is on the way, however, as agentic AI is set to enhance the airport experience for passengers, particularly in terms of checking in baggage, issuing boarding passes, changing or rebooking flights and even ordering your coffee on those 5am flights to paradise.

AGENTIC AI EXPLAINED

Agentic AI works autonomously with very little human oversight. It can understand natural language, plan and optimise workflows, make decisions independently based on changing circumstances, and adapt suggested solutions in real-time.

In simplest terms, it doesn't see and then report a problem, it sees and then solves the problem. In the world of travel, this is revolutionary technology.

AGENCIES COULD ELIMINATE NEARLY ALL WAIT TIMES

AI is increasingly being used to predict passenger flows, open security lanes before bottlenecks form and dynamically allocate staff rather than simply reacting to congestion.

With an agentic operating system receiving information from all departing and arriving airlines, it will learn and predict when airport security needs to increase or decrease staff.

Based on lead time of airline scheduling, agentic AI can create a staff schedule months in advance.

As a result, in the US for example, there will be no need to hold a plane because the TSA is backed up for hours, thus causing downstream delays and fines.

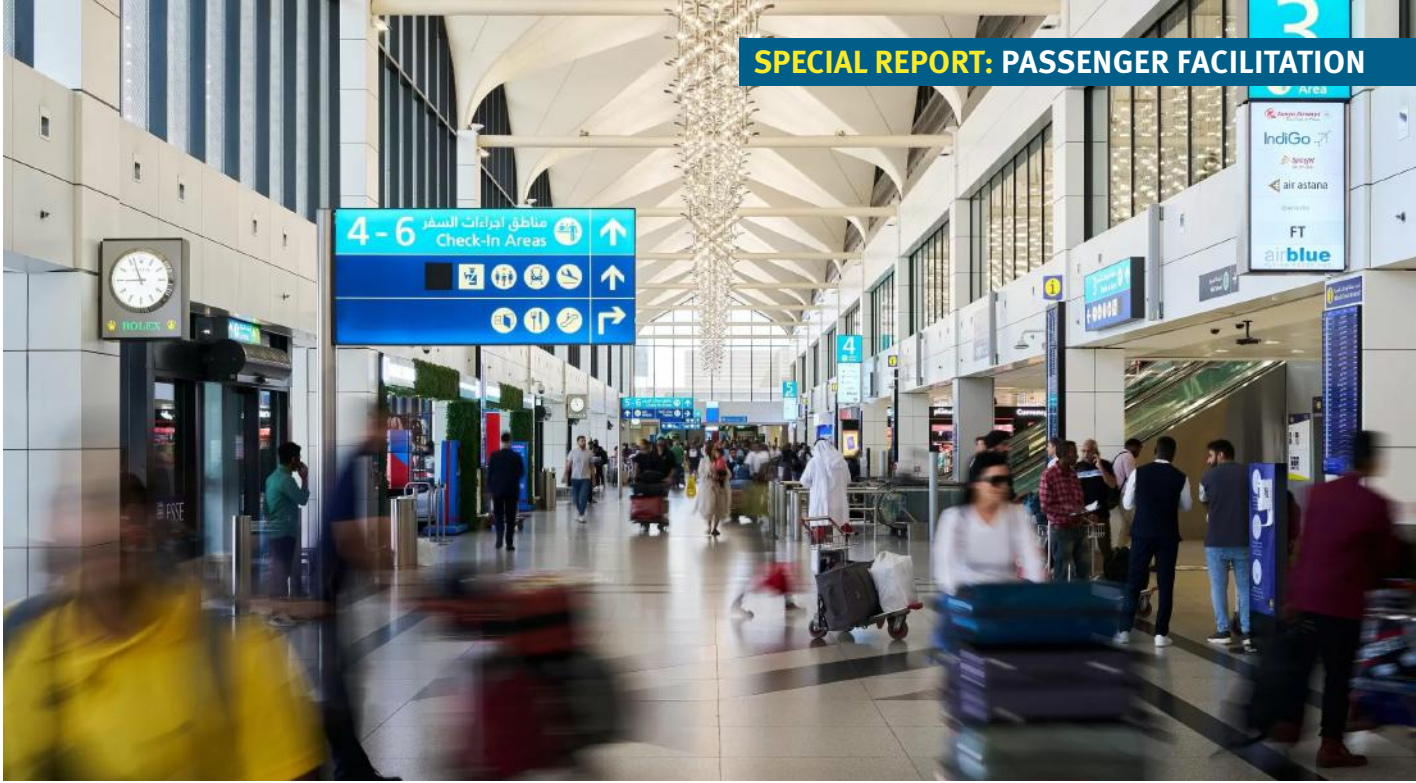
This financial impact cannot be understated. Ground delays cost airports around €166 per minute in the EU and at \$100.80 per minute in the US. That equates to billions in fines worldwide each year.

AIRPORT RETAIL GETS AN UPGRADE

People often move from a security line to another queue for food or coffee before getting to a line to get on a plane. Agentic AI can remove this middle line.

Retail globally is already benefiting from agentic AI, as shown in its predicted growth to over \$231 billion by 2031. Airports must catch up with the rest of the world.

Some examples of agentic AI in action include the facts that agentic AI can dynamically schedule when a store should open or close, know how much staffing is needed, and handle all inventory and ordering.



And it learns more the longer it is in use, so before long can identify when spikes will occur and be able to order accordingly.

Indeed, if it used across all airport retail locations in the terminal it can accurately estimate the footfall they can expect throughout the day in real time.

PREDICTIVE AIRPORTS

The running theme is prediction instead of reaction. Rather than responding to problems, airports can use agentic AI to predict delays, equipment failures, baggage issues and crowding before it happens.

In short, every aspect of travel is known far in advance and can be planned for without any lag time.

COULD AGENTIC AI TRANSFORM AIRPORT TERMINALS?

As biometrics, digital identity and AI become integrated, passengers may move from kerb to gate without repeatedly showing passports or boarding passes.

If the entire airport works upon an agentic operating system and all government agencies and airlines are connected as well, airports of the future might look very different to what we know today.

Yes, bags will still need to be checked, and scanned, as will people, but with processes streamlined (i.e. no need for passengers to show identification multiple times and wait times minimised, helped by more dynamic staffing levels) will there, for example, still be a need for expansive check-in halls?

AGENTIC ADVANTAGE TO THE AIRLINE

Agentic AI is the tool for airlines to localise monitoring and decision-making for delays, optimise flight times and routes, and to maximise fuel usage efficiency.

All of this minimises delays, decreases overheads, and increases affinity from customers and employees.

Agentic AI can change flight routes instantaneously due to inclement weather, increased turbulence, or traffic. Yes, it is all governed by humans, but it can act as independently as safety allows.

Speaking in terms of safety, agentic AI can become key to aircraft health. It can continuously monitor planes and potentially predict and solve issues that could affect flights before the issues occur.

Agentic AI also have the capacity to be the master scheduler of maintenance and retirement of an aircraft.

It knows when the last service was, what needs to be done based on age and flight hours, and based on historical data, will tell an airline when it is time to retire a plane completely. This is lifesaving technology, literally.

AIRLINE AGENTICS TODAY

From *Saudia Airlines' AI-powered Travel Companion* booking an end to end travel via AI agent chat, to AI at Eindhoven Airport improving baggage handling, decreasing wait times and improving customer satisfaction, to *Air Canada* completely rewriting how it manages disruption (shortening average resolution time from 12 hours to 10 minutes) agentic AI is already changing the world of airports and travel. But, it is nowhere near its full potential.

Within this very decade agentic AI will bring super intelligent, asynchronous digital employees providing service to staff and customers once never even dreamed of. This is service available at any moment, to absolutely everyone, with zero wait time.

The airports and airlines that adapt the quickest, will be the ones that win and maintain the loyalty of dedicated employees and customers. Those that don't will continue to burnout staff and lose customers.

About the author

Chetan Dube is an AI pioneer and founder and CEO of *Quant*, which develops cutting-edge digital employee technology.



Sleep well

Overnight accommodation and sleep options at airports continue to grow and now include everything from traditional hotels to cabins and sleep pods, writes Joe Bates.

The need for accommodation at or close to an airport is certainly not a new thing, with the Gate Lodge at London's Croydon Airport, opened in the 1928, arguably being the first ever airport hotel.

Much has changed since then, of course, with hotels now found at most airports and located across the airport campus from inside terminals to commercial developments on airport land.

And as global traffic has grown and more people travel than ever before, airports have adapted to the changing needs of travellers and embraced a whole new range of accommodation options for passengers using their facilities.

These include airside hotels for transfer passengers, dedicated sleep zones and pods, rooms, capsules and cabins that users can hire by the hour or overnight for longer stays.

In this article we will review the latest hotel openings, consider the growing value of the market for sleep pods/cabins, and talk to some of the major players in the market such as GoSleep, Napcabs and Airport Dimensions which unveiled its new Sleepover brand late last year.

We also hear from airports that have been among the pioneers of the adoption of all forms of sleep options – Munich (MUC), Amsterdam Schiphol (AMS) and Singapore Changi (SIN).

UK'S NEWEST AIRPORT HOTEL

The UK and possibly the world's newest airport hotel is the £54 million Dakota Manchester Airport, boldly labelled by some as the city's first luxury airport hotel, which opened for business on July 1.

Designed by KPP Architects, the new 154-room hotel will include a premium bar and brasserie-style grill on the ground floor and provide 130 car parking spaces and a dedicated chauffeur-driven shuttle service to and from the airport terminals.

Located off Enterprise Way on a three-acre plot at Mix Manchester, it is also home to an al fresco Cigar Terrace and Humidor, exclusive private dining rooms, premium top-floor suites and a dedicated valet parking service, which have led to its luxury label.

Matt Townley, group operations director, said: "We look forward to becoming the hotel of choice for travellers, local guests, and businesses alike."



Gareth Jackson, group property director for Manchester Airports Group, has previously described the Dakota as “a superb brand”.

NEW IBIS AT MUNICH AIRPORT

Also brand new is the ibis Styles Munich Airport, which opened in June, just in time for the summer peak period for the German gateway.

The airport notes that it “enriches” its existing portfolio of lodging and dining options and underscores the location’s dynamic development as a premier international hub.

Jost Lammers, CEO of Munich Airport, said: “The expansion of our hotel offerings creates additional capacity for business and leisure travellers, enhances the appeal of our airport, and simultaneously provides important impetus for growth and value creation in the region.

“Modern, experience-oriented hospitality offerings such as the ibis Styles Munich Airport underscore our commitment to further establishing Munich Airport as an innovative and future-oriented hub in the face of international competition.”

The creative design concept of the 358-room hotel is said to combine functionality and comfort, with its colourful interior décor featuring shades of green, blue and slate said to have been inspired by the landscape along the Isar River.

The Accor Group operated hotel, which joins the Hilton Munich Airport, is located close to the airport terminals and LabCampus, Munich Airport’s innovation centre.

ALMATY AND BRISBANE

Elsewhere in the world, a new 171-room Radisson Blu Hotel has opened at Almaty Airport in Kazakhstan, and Brisbane Airport is inviting hotel chains to submit their interest in potentially operating one of two new facilities it would like to open ahead of the 2032 Olympic Games in the city.

The potential new hotel sites at Brisbane Airport (BNE) are adjacent to the International Terminal and in its fast-growing Skygate retail and entertainment precinct.

Brisbane Airport’s executive general manager for commercial, Scott Norris, said each location offered unique advantages for operators seeking to establish a presence at BNE.

“Location is everything, and it doesn’t get more connected than being at the front door of Queensland’s busiest gateway,” he noted.

“Brisbane Airport’s three current airport hotels are consistently at capacity, so there is no doubt there is demand for additional hotel rooms.

“Long-term, Brisbane requires thousands of new hotel rooms ahead of the 2032 Olympics and so we’re highly confident the airport can support five hotels.”

AIRPORT SLEEP PODS/CABINS

While we can imagine the potentially lucrative nature of the hotel business, it might come as a surprise to learn that the market for airport sleep pods is also huge.



Indeed, it was valued at \$131.17 million in 2025, is projected to reach \$144.54 million this year, and if it grows at the expected CAGR of 10.84% over the next six years it will be worth \$269.7 million by 2032, according to ResearchAndMarkets.com research.

The figures are revealed in its 'Airport Sleeping Pods Market – Global Forecast 2026-2032' report, with the company noting that "airport sleeping pods have emerged as an innovative solution designed to transform idle time into restorative periods".

It goes on: "These compact, self-contained units provide an oasis of privacy, allowing passengers to recharge before continuing their travels.

"In addition to enhancing passenger welfare, these pods present a strategic avenue for airports to diversify their non-aeronautical revenue streams.

"By integrating advanced features such as adjustable lighting, climate control and ergonomic sleeping surfaces, airports can position these offerings as premium services that appeal to business travellers seeking productivity and leisure passengers valuing comfort.

"Moreover, the introduction of modular pod installations contributes to space optimisation, enabling airports to repurpose underutilised areas for high-yield facilities."

So, who are the main players in this market today and what offerings do they provide at airports?

They include Napcabs, GoSleep and Airport Dimensions courtesy of its new Sleepover product, although the fate of some of the original players in the airport market such as SnoozeCube and Sleepbox is unclear with both appearing to have ceased trading.

While an ever-increasing number of airports in Asia have their own hugely popular capsule/pod hotels for visitors. These include the Avagard Capsule Hotel at Bangkok Suvarnabhumi; 9h nine hours at Tokyo Narita; VATC SleepPod at Hanoi Noi Bai (pictured on the previous page) and Relaxation at Beijing Daxing.

READY FOR A SLEEPOVER?

Airport Dimensions has rebranded its sleep product as Sleepover, formalising a new airport sleep station category.

It notes that "the bold evolution" of the former sleep 'n fly concept is a direct response to the changing needs of modern travellers.

Sleepover, it says, gives travellers privacy and real rest in the terminal while helping airports activate space that is often underutilised.

It believes that the private, pay-as-you-go option complements lounges rather than competing against them, meeting a different moment in the journey with a purpose-built solution

Talking about why Lima's Jorge Chávez International Airport chose Sleepover, the airport's travel retail manager, Marinela Beke, said: "We saw the gap between the public concourse and premium spaces, especially around early flights and long connections. Sleepover closes that gap with a pragmatic approach.

"Early adoption has been strong, feedback is positive, and it complements our existing offer by giving passengers a practical way to travel more comfortably."

Sleepover's proposition is deliberately simple: modular pods and cabins that feel calm, safe, and comfortable, with optional add-ons such as showers.



According to its AX25 research, Airport Dimensions says that 49% of passengers actively want or are highly interested in sleep facilities at airports, while 95% of airport executives admit current terminal space is not being fully utilised.

Andrew Van Eeden, vice president, global new product and innovations, Airport Dimensions, said: “Travellers want privacy and real rest in the hours between or before flights, without having to compromise.

“Sleepover gives them that calm – in the terminal, on their terms – while giving airports a configurable, insight-led product that fits operational reality.”

TIME FOR SOME ZZZs IN A NAPCAB

The dominant player in the German market is napcabs, which has air-conditioned micro-cabins at airside locations across Berlin, Munich and Frankfurt airports.

It boasts thirteen cabins at Munich Airport – eleven airside and two landsides – and eight at Frankfurt Airport, including two in the gateway’s newly opened Terminal 3.

Napcabs notes that each cabin provides users with a private, climate-controlled space to sleep, work or simply recharge.

All feature a premium bed with fresh bedding, Wi-Fi, charging facilities, a table for working, and an intuitive self-service booking system, making them ideal for both short stays and longer layovers.

Napcabs CEO, Fabian Friedrich, believes that the evolution of its cabins and increase in demand for them over the past 18 years shows that travellers want more sleeping options at airports.

He says: “We’ve seen a shift in the way people travel. Airports have evolved from purely transit spaces into places where passengers spend considerable amounts of time.

“Today’s travellers expect privacy, comfort, and flexibility, whether they want to sleep, work or simply escape the busy terminal for a few hours.

“The consistently growing demand for our cabins confirms that passengers increasingly value dedicated spaces for rest. Sleep is no longer considered a luxury during travel – it’s becoming an essential part of a better passenger experience.”

Is the company actively working to expand its operations outside of Germany?

“International expansion is an important part of our long-term strategy,” admits Friedrich. We see growing interest from airports across Europe and beyond, as more airport operators recognise that high-quality rest facilities have become an important part of the passenger experience.

“When selecting new partners, we focus on airports that share our commitment to innovation and premium passenger services.

“While Germany remains our strongest market today, we are actively exploring opportunities to bring the napcabs concept to additional international airports.”

Napcabs started in 2008 with a pilot project featuring two cabins at Munich Airport. Its first permanent location opened in 2010 in the Schengen area of Munich Airport Terminal 2 with four cabins.



TREND SETTER

Finnish company GoSleep now has two different types of sleep pods in use at airports, the Recovery Pod designed for short-term sleep, and the more spacious Igloo Pod, which can also be used for work.

Between them they are currently installed at seven airports across the world – Amsterdam Schiphol (AMS), Helsinki (HEL), Istanbul (IST) and Warsaw (WAW) in Europe, Abu Dhabi (AUH) and Dubai (DXB) in the Middle East, and Perth (PER) in Australia.

CEO, Topi Piispanen, is in no doubt that demand for places where passengers can rest, relax and sleep in privacy at airports will only rise as demand for air travel grows in the coming decades.

He says: “Passenger expectations are changing rapidly. Today’s travellers increasingly look for convenient, comfortable and private spaces where they can rest, recover, recharge or focus between flights.

“We believe that our dedicated GoSleep on-demand rest solution occupies a unique position within the airport ecosystem. Hotels, lounges and sleep pods each serve different traveller needs, and together they help airports create a more complete passenger experience.

“What we consistently see from passenger feedback is strong demand for flexible, on-demand rest options inside the terminal. At GoSleep our mission is simple: Arrive tired. Leave rested.

“Our goal is to help travellers continue their journey feeling better than when they arrived. Our service is about rest, recovery, wellbeing and creating a better travel experience.

Talking about the success of the installation of its sleep pods at XWELL’s Xpres Spa location in Amsterdam Schiphol’s D-Pier a year ago, Piispanen says: “Regarding Schiphol, while we do not disclose operational performance metrics publicly, passenger feedback and partner engagement have been very encouraging.

“The installation has reinforced our view that travellers value access to dedicated spaces designed specifically for rest, recovery and wellbeing within the terminal environment.”

Will more airports be added to the company’s growing list of customers in 2026? Piispanen replies: “We continue to see strong interest from airports and service providers exploring proven ways to enhance the passenger experience.

“While we do not comment on future projects until they are announced, we remain very optimistic about the long-term growth of the category.

“The successful introduction of our next-generation GoSleep pods at Helsinki Airport in January 2026 has reinforced our belief that we are only at the beginning of a much larger shift in how airports think about passenger wellbeing.

“Travellers increasingly expect airports to support not only mobility, but also recovery, comfort and wellbeing throughout their journey.

“Looking ahead, we expect rest and recovery services to become a standard part of airport infrastructure, alongside lounges, F&B, hotels, wellness services and other passenger-centric amenities.

“Airports are increasingly recognising that traveller wellbeing is not a luxury – it is an important part of the overall passenger experience.

“As passenger expectations continue to evolve, we believe our on-demand rest solutions will play an increasingly important role in helping airports create more comfortable and enjoyable human-centred travel environments.”

MUNICH AIRPORT

The same willingness to embrace new ideas, services and facilities could apply to Munich Airport (MUC), which hasn’t looked back with sleep cabins since first introducing them in 2008.



Seen as pioneering move at the time, the airport partnered with Munich-based napcabs GmbH on the first cabin and has worked with it ever since to expand its range of services.

Today, a total of 11 napcabs are available in Terminal 2 and the satellite building. They are equipped with comfortable sleeping and working areas, as well as free internet access.

MUC notes that the new napcabsXL is particularly popular, offering enough space for two people or families with a queen-size bed, a table, and an armchair.

The average booking duration for napcabs at Munich Airport is currently around 3.5 hours.

The company responsible for operating MUC's Terminal 2, a joint venture between Munich Airport and Lufthansa, has seen a substantial year-over-year surge in revenues from the napcabs.

And to meet the increasing demand, additional cabins are planned for 2026.

Ivonne Kuger, T2's managing director, said: "With napcabs, we offer our guests a retreat that perfectly matches the five-star standard of our premium hub.

"The high demand shows us how valuable comfortable rest and work facilities are for modern travellers. That is why we are continuously expanding this offering to further enhance the passenger experience at Munich Airport."

AMSTERDAM SCHIPHOL TAKING STOCK

Like MUC, Amsterdam Schiphol Airport was an early adopter of micro-accommodation, opting for a Yotel in 2008 before expanding its offerings last year with five GoSleep Recovery Pods.

The airport told *Airport World* that it is currently exploring how sleep facilities, including sleeping pods, can enhance the experience and wellbeing of passengers using its facilities.

"Wellbeing is an important pillar within Schiphol's strategy. Therefore, we are currently exploring how sleep facilities, including sleeping pods, can best contribute to this," said a spokesperson.

CHANGI COMMITTED TO REST & RELAXATION

Going down a slightly more traditional route is Singapore's Changi Airport, which doesn't currently have any sleep pod accommodation in its terminals, but instead offers a variety of hotels and boasts its own snooze lounges.

The complimentary snooze lounges are located in designated areas in the transit zones of all four terminals at Changi, and form part of the holistic experience operator Changi Airport Group (CAG) wants to provide for passengers.

Open 24/7, each provide comfortable seating and soft lighting, making them ideal for naps. Power points allow users to charge devices while they rest.

In addition to the snooze lounges, Changi has Transit hotels in Terminal 1, 2 and 3; the Crowne Plaza at Terminal 3; and a YotelAir. A new Hotel Indigo, currently under construction next to Terminal 2, is expected to open in 2028.

CAG says that the new 255-room Hotel Indigo Changi Airport will feature innovative design elements and modern facilities, including a rooftop day club, bar and infinity pool offering panoramic views of the runway, airport boulevard and skyline.

It also reveals that "with layers of lush rainforest and hanging epiphytes stretching over seven storeys, its design will be centred around the concept of a 'Floating Forest'."

AW



Talking tech

We review the highlights of our recent ‘Making AI Work in Airports’ webinar, which covered the huge potential of artificial intelligence and the environment needed to encourage its future development.

Watched by over 300 delegates from 40 countries, our recent ‘Making AI Work in Airports’ webinar shone the spotlight on where value is emerging in the use of artificial intelligence at airports and what it takes to successfully deliver it.

The event, hosted by the Egremont Group in partnership with *Airport World*, provided an early taster for the types of discussions we can expect at December’s AI in Airports Conference in London.

In the hot seat were Maurice Jenkins, chief innovation officer at Miami International Airport; Sharon Prior, founder and CEO of Inovivo and former director of technology at Heathrow; and Nick Crane, the Egremont Group’s senior consultant for airport operations transformation.

Introducing the discussion, Egremont’s Crane explained that the webinar formed a wider part of the AI and Airports initiative.

“AI in Airports is a growing industry initiative that’s bringing together airport leaders, technology experts, and innovators to explore how artificial intelligence is reshaping airports,” said Crane.

“Our ambition with this is simple, really. AI has leapt upon us from a practical perspective, and what we’re aiming to do is bring the industry together to share practical experience and accelerate the responsible adoption of AI across airports, improving life for all of us that work within airports and all of our passengers as well.”

In his opening remarks, MIA’s Jenkins stated that technology would play a key role in helping the aviation industry cope with the expected more than doubling of passenger traffic over the next ten years.

“We realise that traditional brick and mortar works very well, but it can only take you so far. So, the question comes into play, how do we leverage technology, and how do we create and be more innovative to improve our business processes within our airport ecosystem,” mused Jenkins.

“My charge and my challenge for what I do for my airport and other board engagements around the world is looking at how we can establish enhanced frameworks of leveraging technology innovation into an operational environment to create better efficiencies and business process improvements.”

Prior, who founded her boutique AI native transformation company last year, opened by admitting that she was always excited to talk about tech, and learnt a lot about artificial intelligence and the benefits it can bring an organisation during her time at Heathrow Airport.

WHERE IS AI DELIVERING VALUE TODAY IN AIRPORTS?

Jenkins noted that AI is already creating value for airports, perhaps most obviously by helping them become predictive and less reactive in terms of operational decision-making.

He cited using AI to gather commercial data from duty free sales, improve turnaround times and get better at predicting passenger flows, gate optimisation and stand utilisation as just some of the ways MIA is leveraging the technology today.



“For me, I think the biggest opportunity isn’t just about creating what I call a smart airport, it’s the chance to create a predictive airport,” he said. “I want to be able to sweat the assets and leverage our infrastructure more to go ahead and provide better value-added resources and opportunities for our airport ecosystem.”

Prior agreed with Jenkins that AI will be key for the industry to move from reactivity to predictiveness and being able to predict what’s ahead and coming our way.

Talking about artificial intelligence in general, she noted that “80% of AI is data” and that, to a certain extent, the industry still underestimated the value of data collected at airports and isn’t good at sharing it.

She also felt that too often airports focused their attention on technology selection rather than integration with other systems and sharing data.

“I was having a conversation with a GCC airport about a decision to change their ACDM, and they’re talking about the tech, and what facilities that technology needed to have. What they weren’t really thinking about was how the data was going to flow between all the major actors,” said Prior.

Agreeing with Prior about the value of data and the need to share it, Jenkins commented: “Everyone says that data is king and is worth more than gold and oil and every other resource sitting out there, but it has no value unless it’s ingested and used in the ecosystem.”

WHAT DOES IT TAKE ORGANISATIONALLY TO MAKE AI WORK?

Both agreed that the adoption of artificial intelligence requires trust in its capabilities, clear protocols for action, and good governance and guardrails.

And, in this respect, human oversight and organisational buy-in is essential to the success of any initiative, starting with leadership from the top and across all departments.

“This will sound strange coming from me, but AI is not a technology initiative,” said Prior. “It is the new thing. It is a great capability.

It enables a lot of businesses to really perform much better than they currently do, but it has to be taken out of being an IT-led initiative.

“This is a transformation agenda and it sits at the heart of any organisation. In my opinion, if AI sits almost exclusively in the technology function, it stays small. Not because people don’t see the value, but because they’re still doing their day and thinking in the way that they’ve always thought and operating under the business model they’ve always operated under. This needs leadership from the top and almost co-sponsorship of programmes.”

HOW CAN AIRPORTS MOVE FROM PILOTS AND EXPERIMENTATION TO SCALE TO DELIVERY?

Prior and Jenkins accepted that scaling AI from pilot programmes to operations can be a difficult, which is why initiatives need to demonstrate clear business ownership, measurable outcomes, strong data foundations and the ability to be integrated into daily workflows.

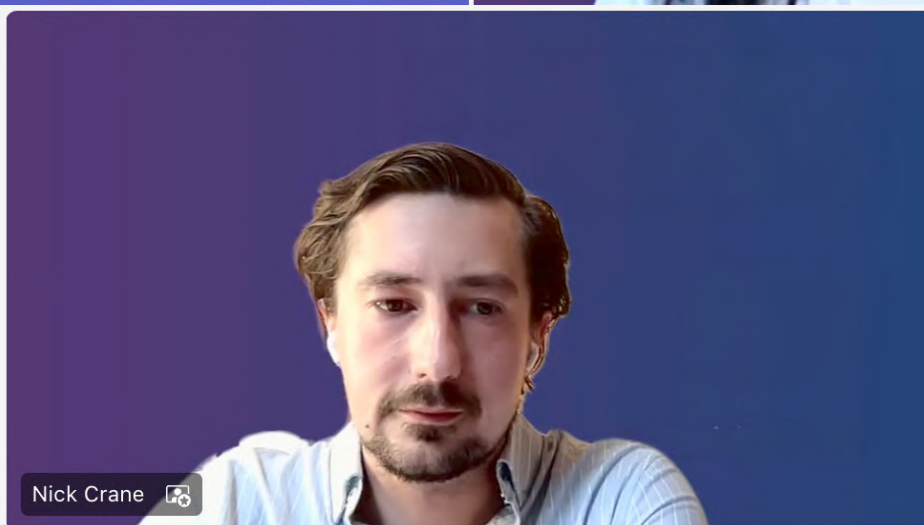
In terms of what separates initiatives that gain traction and those that remain an isolated proof of concept, Jenkins stated that concepts had to be scalable, measurable and potentially generate a ROI in some capacity.

He said: “We’ve done AI pilots. We understand AI’s capabilities. Let’s go from pilots to applications that we can now scale, that are measurable, and then with that you get that first test bed with an executive sponsor.”

He revealed that a recently completed pilot project now means that mounds of data, drawings and paperwork about environmental processes and projects at MIA that used to take days or weeks to find is now available in minutes because of the use of artificial intelligence.

WHAT SHOULD AIRPORT LEADERS BE PRIORITISING OVER THE NEXT 12 TO 24 MONTHS?

Inovivo’s Prior said: “If advising an airport today, I’d say, first, get the data house in order. I don’t mean a multi-year data transformation programme, but you have to have a targeted piece of work on two or three data domains that underpin the highest value AI use case that has to be the first thing to be done.



“The second point for me is this is about people as well as well the operating model. So, invest in changing the operating model, not just the tech. That means the training, the change management, revised roles and responsibilities, and have clarity around the accountability of AI driven decisions.

“Thirdly, I’d say build a small, very small cross-functional team that owns the AI agenda end to end, so not just the technology, it’s got to be a fusion team of technologists, operators, and commercials sitting together. We are not talking about a centre of excellence that writes papers, but a very small SWAT team that actually delivers something and shifts outcomes.”

Industry veteran Jenkins said: “I think over the next 24 months, the strongest things I could actually recommend is to look at some small operational problems and solve them exceptionally well. Let’s do a great job at looking at that, and make sure it’s something that’s tangible, that’s truly attainable, and look at that to scale.”

From MIA’s position, Jenkins noted that he was looking at five verticals – operations control, passenger flow, cargo analytics, predictive maintenance, and workforce productivity.

With regards to cargo, he said: “When we came out of COVID, the one thing that truly satisfied or saved this industry as much as possible was cargo, but we’re not talking about now, so I want to put a little bit more of a core emphasis in cargo and cargo analytics.

“We could learn a lot by looking at some of that data, and helping to build in more predictability and manageability of leveraging AI within the cargo space as well, because I think that’s tangible.

“We can also do more with regards to predictive maintenance to help us manage our resources better. The finance folks will love that.”

Host, Nick Crane, believes that there are five key takeaways from the highly engaging and informative June 30 webinar. They are:

- 1. Sequencing matters as much as ambition.** The airports pulling ahead are not necessarily the most technologically advanced; they are the ones that have resolved data ownership, governance and trust before scaling.
- 2. Predictive beats reactive.** The greatest value is realised where AI helps airports anticipate demand, disruption and operational challenges before they happen.
- 3. Organisation matters more than technology.** Leadership, governance and strong data foundations are proving more important than the AI tools themselves.
- 4. AI is a business transformation.** Successful initiatives have clear ownership, measurable outcomes and operational buy-in.
- 5. Start small and scale.** Focus on high-value use cases, prove the business case and expand from there.

SAVE THE DATE

AI in Airports

Unlocking the Power of AI to Shape the Future of Airports

Date

1–2 December 2026

Venue

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AI in Airports: Mission Statement

To bring together airport leaders and industry innovators to explore where and how AI can create real operational, commercial and strategic value across the airport ecosystem.



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Smart Cleaning System: Redefining Facility Management through Innovation



2 Best innovation
in airport operations and
installations management

Cleaning goes high-tech

Joe Bates shines the spotlight on Queen Alia International Airport's Smart Cleaning System and the state-of-the-art robotic technology taking airport cleaning to the next level.

As Airport Service Quality (ASQ) customer experience surveys have been telling us for years, the cleanliness of facilities can play a significant role in how visitors perceive and rate an airport.

Nowhere is cleanliness more important than in the rest rooms, which airports are addressing through improved cleaning regimes and technology that alerts staff when attention is needed, either to clean up or replace stock.

And in recent years autonomous cleaning robots have become more commonplace at airports, most widely seen cleaning floors, but also used to sanitise high-touch surfaces in terminals such as handrails, seats and kiosks.

Amman's Queen Alia International Airport is one of the airports to turn to robots and other technologies to help keep its facilities clean.

Indeed, its Smart Cleaning System integrates AI, machine learning, and IoT sensors to optimise cleaning operations across the terminal.

Designed to interface with other airport systems, the solution leverages real-time data collection and analytics to optimise cleaning routes and resource allocation in direct response to passenger traffic patterns and shifting operational needs.

"Innovation at Queen Alia International Airport is driven by our commitment to enhancing the passenger experience while improving operational efficiency," says Fatina Gammoh, AIG's facilities management and operations contracts manager.

The new approach, she notes, enables the airport's cleaning teams to proactively address high-traffic areas, boosting efficiency and ensuring consistently high standards of hygiene throughout the terminal.

At the heart of the initiative is a new Cleaning Control Centre within the airport's Operations Control Centre and the deployment of state-of-the-art cleaning robots.

And the results have been impressive, with the system saving 57,000 litres of water a day due to the efficiency of the airport's four robotic cleaners. In addition, the Smart Cleaning System has led to a 20% reduction in consumables and waste; and an 80% decline in complaints about the lack of paper towels and soap.

While 96% of the 463,000 passengers interviewed in real-time at Queen Alia gave positive feedback about their experience at the airport, and 89% were happy with the cleanliness of its facilities.

Gammoh notes: "Jordan has a very long history in doing more with less and returning limitations into success and solutions, and this project, the Smart Cleaning System, is carrying the same DNA.

"At Queen Alia we have turned basic airport cleaning operations into a smart, data-driven predictive system that is now an integral part of our airport's operational backbone.

"Like all airports, we operate in a constantly changing environment where passenger flow continuously fluctuates, and efficiency is a daily challenge.

"The traditional approach to cleaning simply couldn't keep pace with our evolving operational needs. This reality meant that it was not simply a cleaning problem, but an operational challenge as well.

"So, we adopted an intelligent solution that adapts hour by hour, machine by machine, and washroom by washroom to ensure seamless cleanliness throughout the day."



Queen Alia's Smart Cleaning System won the award for Best Innovation in Airport Operations and Installations Management in last year's Technology Innovation Awards from ACI World.

ENHANCING CLEANING OPERATIONS IN SPAIN

An operating model based on technological innovation and the combination of human resources and autonomous robotics has been introduced by Optima at Barcelona, Seville, Málaga, Alicante, Valencia, Menorca and Ibiza airports in Spain.

At Barcelona-El Prat Airport, several robotic machines operate continuously during the day carrying out cleaning tasks safely even in high-traffic zones.

While at night, when passenger flow is lower, conventional scrubbers and sweepers from UK based manufacturer Tennant are used to reinforce and deepen the cleaning carried out throughout the day.

The goal, says Optima, is to increase operational efficiency, ensure more consistent cleaning results, and optimise the use of available resources.

It is quick to note that one of the decisive factors in selecting the solutions was the autonomy and artificial intelligence technology integrated into the scrubbers and sweepers.

From a resource management perspective, autonomous solutions act as support for existing teams. For example, they reduce the need to hire additional staff for certain tasks while ensuring operational continuity even during periods of lower staff availability.

A single operator, for instance, can supervise multiple machines simultaneously, expanding service coverage without compromising quality.

In addition to improving operational efficiency, robotic solutions contribute to the airport's sustainability goals as the technology optimises the use of water, energy, and cleaning products in each cycle, reducing the environmental impact of operations.

A bonus is that passengers and airport visitors seem to like the robots.

"These machines are very eye-catching and spark curiosity and surprise when seen working autonomously in such a busy environment as an airport," says Albert Celaya, Optima Facility's service manager at Barcelona-El Prat Airport.

FLEETWOOD VAC AND MERYL SWEEP

Earlier this year London's Heathrow Airport revealed that Fleetwood Vac, Meryl Sweep, Scrubrina Carpenter and Cleany McClean Face are among the newly chosen names of its cleaning robots.

The UK hub opted for the names for its new 'cobots' after receiving thousands of suggestions from the public, with puns and pop-culture references making the final cut.

Other chosen robot names include Boeing 7 Floor 7, Air Floorce One, R2-T2, Lightning McClean, RoboMop, Obi-Wan Cleanobi, Moptimus Prime and Doctor Who-ver.

The 24 newly named cobots have landed across all terminals, complete with personalised name tags, and passengers travelling through the gateway this summer are encouraged to spot their favourites as they glide through the airport.

Each autonomous robot can clean up to 4,800 square metres per day using advanced mapping technology and water-recycling systems, operating for up to three hours before heading back to recharge.

The cobots were introduced to Heathrow in partnership with facilities management company Mitie and represent the UK's largest fleet of autonomous cleaning robots.

Mitie has delivered cleaning services across Heathrow's terminals since 2022, with 850 cleaning and hygiene specialists working across the airport, supported by Mitie's innovative cleaning technology.



Planning for the unexpected

Adaptable design and flexible development are key to airport resilience, writes Anthony Le Caherec, business leader for airports at Bouygues Construction.

While dealing with a busy summer period, airports also face a context of growing operational uncertainty.

Disruption caused by fuel supply constraints, rising oil prices, extreme weather and fluctuating demand is becoming an increasingly regular feature of aviation.

For airport owners and operators, this underlines an important reality: infrastructure cannot be designed solely for ideal conditions; it must also perform when the unexpected occurs and systems are under pressure.

Resilience is becoming one of the defining measures of airport quality. In practice, resilience is not just about recovering from disruptions and means creating environments that absorb shocks, adapt quickly and continue delivering safe, efficient and commercially successful operations.

EARLY INVOLVEMENT OF CONTRACTORS FOR MORE RESILIENCE

The construction phase is one of the most critical and most risky elements in any airport project, particularly in live operational environments.

Expansions, refurbishments and upgrades must be delivered while maintaining safety, security and continuity of service for passengers, staff, airlines and all operational processes.

Poorly planned or executed works can create bottlenecks, disrupt circulation routes and amplify operational vulnerability. Well-planned projects, by contrast, can strengthen resilience and goodwill.

Airports are increasingly recognising the value of bringing experienced constructor-developers into projects early, so that capabilities in airport finance, design, build, operations and maintenance can be considered together rather than in sequence.

Early involvement of contractors with strong knowledge of the very specific requirements of airports helps ensure that operational constraints, buildability and phasing requirements are factored in from the outset.

It also allows project teams to work collaboratively across airport operations, maintenance, access, transport and commercial functions, ensuring nothing falls between the cracks and providing a better long-term outcome.

RESILIENCE IS ALSO ABOUT ANTICIPATING FUTURE NEEDS

Thinking long term is particularly important given that airports are not static assets. They need to respond to traffic growth, evolving passenger expectations and changing safety and environmental requirements and regulations.

A successful project therefore has to look beyond the immediate brief. It must account for future expansion, preventive maintenance, electrification of infrastructure and equipment, and integration with other transport modes.

In this sense, resilience is no longer only about coping with disruption inside the terminal; it is about ensuring the airport remains adaptable, embedded in its local ecosystem and relevant over the long term.



This more integrated approach can already be seen in major airport projects. At Zagreb International Airport, we delivered a new international passenger terminal while also operating existing facilities.

The project included a €300 million private financing package and was structured to preserve commercial revenues while extending the airport.

This highlights that when design, delivery, financing and operation are considered together, resilience and revenue are not separate objectives.

A terminal that protects operational flow under pressure is also one better positioned to protect its overall performance.

Long-term partnership is equally important. We first worked on Larnaca and Paphos airports in Cyprus in 2006, delivering then new terminals and modernising existing infrastructure under a long-term concession model.

Expansion projects are currently under construction while the airports remain live and operational. This will allow a significant increase of the overall capacity of both airports.

The continuity of our involvement shows how early design and construction decisions can support future scalability.

Rather than considering expansion as a new exercise years later, the airport can evolve on the bases of infrastructure already designed with growth and adaptability in mind.

It is also a strong example of resilience in practice: planning not only for what the airport needs today, but for what it may need in the future and how to deliver it without disruption.

Other projects reinforce the same lesson. Our airport portfolio includes highly varied contexts, from Iqaluit Airport in Canada, where a new terminal and aircraft infrastructure were delivered in Arctic conditions,

to airport developments in Madagascar and the future expansion of Paris-Beauvais.

Different markets bring different constraints, but the principle remains the same: airport projects succeed when operational readiness, construction methodology, financing and long-term asset performance are considered together from the very beginning.

This is where experienced airport specialists add most value, by helping airport owners make decisions that improve resilience across the whole lifecycle of the asset.

AN ENVIRONMENTAL APPROACH FOR GREATER RESILIENCE

Sustainability is also becoming inseparable from resilience. Airports are under growing pressure to decarbonise, reduce operational emissions and comply with stricter ESG and regulatory frameworks.

That has major implications for design, construction and operations, from low-carbon materials and energy-efficient buildings to electrified infrastructure and sustainable financing models.

An airport that cannot adapt to environmental requirements will struggle to remain commercially robust in the years ahead.

For airport owners and operators, the conclusion is clear. Resilience cannot be added at the end of a project. It has to be integrated from the start, through a holistic development approach that connects designers, construction contractors and airport specialists early on, to ensure more collaboration between their respective fields of expertise.

The strongest airport projects will be those shaped early by experienced partners who understand how to align construction methodology and phasing with passenger experience, commercial performance, operational continuity and future adaptability.

In today's volatile aviation market, planning for the unexpected is becoming essential for successful airport development.



Rent review

With upward-only rent reviews to be abolished in parts of the UK, Sam Folley and Natasha Saunders from international law firm Trowers & Hamlin consider how airports can protect their revenues.

Buried within the newly passed English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 (the Act) are new provisions that prohibit upward-only rent review clauses (UORRs) in all new commercial leases in England and Wales.

Airport operators typically have steady rental income streams derived from property portfolios, which will be impacted by the reforms.

Indeed, the prohibition of UORRs may expose airport operators to downward adjustments in rent during periods of economic downturn or reduced passenger footfall.

In this article we examine the details of the new law, how this could impact the airport sector, and the mitigation strategies available to protect income in the post-ban environment.

WHAT THE LEGISLATION DOES

– Types of tenancies covered. The Act amends the Landlord and Tenant Act of 1954 by inserting new provisions that prohibit upward-only rent review clauses in qualifying commercial leases.

The ban will apply to all business tenancies and across all property sectors, including industrial, office, retail, hotels, logistics and mixed-use.

It will apply to tenancies made pursuant to any kind of arrangement, including renewal leases and landlord put options (but only if these arrangements are made after the ban comes into effect).

– What is prohibited? Any rent review provision in a new lease will be void to the extent that it guarantees a minimum percentage uplift irrespective of market conditions or a reference factor (e.g., tenant

turnover, CPI/RPI) or prevents the reviewed rent from falling below any previously agreed level.

There is still some uncertainty as to what exactly will fall within the prohibition. A definitive stance will only be possible after further guidance has been released.

– Implementation. The ban is not yet fully in force, and this will be implemented by secondary legislation, expected in 2027.

A retrospective element is already in effect, with renewal leases made (a) pursuant to a contractual renewal option entered into on or after March 17, 2026; and (b) granted after the ban comes into effect, being subject to the ban when that renewal option is exercised.

WHAT IMPACT WILL THIS HAVE ON THE AIRPORT SECTOR?

– Threatened non-aeronautical income streams. Airport property portfolios are generally considered a low-risk asset class due to high demand and income certainty provided by UORRs.

However, the prohibition presents a shift in risk allocation by introducing the possibility of downwards rental adjustments.

That said, it is important to distinguish between airport real estate and real estate in the wider market. As space within an airport is at a premium, airport operators can generally charge higher rents.

Further, in the absence of a UORR, open market rent reviews may still deliver upwards or, at worst, flat rental outcomes given sustained demand.

– Fairer share of commercial risk. Commercial risk will be more fairly allocated between landlord and tenant under the new regime. Rents



will more closely track market conditions and allow for downwards adjustments (in theory).

However, in practice, negotiations are likely to continue to be shaped by the same dynamics that generally govern airport real estate.

The scarcity of space and high demand within airports will continue to underpin landlord leverage, allowing airport operators to effectively exercise many of the mitigation options outlined below.

MITIGATION OPTIONS

– Shorter terms and broader break options. Airports are dynamic environments, and airport operators can use this to their advantage by enforcing shorter lease terms.

This reduces the period of exposure to downward rent movements, enabling re-letting to market at each expiry.

However, this will increase transactional costs, in addition to creating income uncertainty due to re-letting risks.

A broader break option could also be used to reset the rent at regular intervals. The decision as to whether to break a particular lease could then be made with regards to market conditions at the time of the break.

– Use of concession agreements. Airport operators could expand the use of concession agreements to document non-retail occupational arrangements. This allows airport operators to incorporate provisions to ensure rents will increase.

There is a risk that use of a concession agreement will fall foul of anti-avoidance provisions if a court interprets it as constituting a leasing arrangement. However, if drafted properly, these should be outside of the ban.

– Fixed rent increases. Fixed, stepped rent increases, determined and agreed at the beginning of the term, are permitted under the new regime.

This provides maximum income certainty for the airport operator. However, there is no flexibility – it is a gamble as to whether a tenant

will end up paying more, the same, or less than the market rent in a few years' time.

– Rent 'top-ups'. A further option is the inclusion of a factor-linked 'top-up' mechanism within the lease itself.

Under this model, the base rent itself remains fixed (and would therefore be unaffected by the ban), but the tenant would be liable to pay an additional fee where a variable factor such as turnover or passenger footfall exceeds an agreed threshold.

This arrangement increases the probability of an increase in income whilst simultaneously preserving a baseline rent.

– Rebalancing revenue towards aeronautical income. Where non-aeronautical revenue is at risk, other aeronautical income streams remain unaffected.

Airport operators could consider accelerating the disposal of real estate assets with weak demand and audit any imminent plans for further real estate acquisitions.

CONCLUSION

Though the abolition of UORRs present a threat to rental income for airport operators, not all is lost as there are still a number of options available to increase income strength.

Existing portfolios are not immediately impaired, and pre-April 2026 leases will retain their UORR clauses for their remaining terms.

If you've read this far and are based outside of England and Wales, it would be wise to take inspiration from the existing advanced UORR drafting system on how to future-proof and maximise your real estate income streams – at least before you're banned from doing it too.

About the authors

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Gelephu International Airport

New gateway to act as catalyst for growth, trade and development of Gelephu Mindfulness City in the Kingdom of Bhutan.

Gelephu International Airport is a stunning new airport being built against the background of the Himalayas in Bhutan's Gelephu Mindfulness City Special Administrative Region.

Located around 10 kilometres from the Indian border in southern Bhutan, the airport will serve Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) and boast an initial capacity of 1.3 million passengers per annum when it opens in 2029.

Early traffic projections suggest that passenger numbers won't reach this figure until 2040, but such is the confidence in the success of project that plans are already in place to increase the airport's capacity to 5.5mppa by 2065.

The airport is a collaboration between the Kingdom of Bhutan and aviation engineering firm NACO, and an integral part of the GMC masterplan designed by Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), Arup, and Cistri.

The striking diagonal structure of the 68,000sqm terminal building will be crafted from locally and sustainably sourced timber and adorned with traditional Bhutanese woodcarvings by local artists.

According to the design team, the painted façade is said to draw inspiration from the 'Kachen,' a wooden pillar revered for its structural significance and intricate design, embodying Bhutanese architectural heritage and spiritual symbolism.

Designed to accommodate GMC's projected growth, the airport's timber frames are structurally independent, allowing for simple disassembly and expansion. The airport's roof features PV panels, in line with Bhutan's position as a carbon-negative nation.

Bjarke Ingels, founder and creative director of BIG, says: "An airport is the first and last impression you get of a place you visit. For the Gelephu International Airport, we have tried to embody the nature and culture of the country and the Mindfulness City.

Project Details

Location: Gelephu Mindfulness City, Bhutan

Important developments: New airport

Scheduled completion: 2029

Client: The Kingdom of Bhutan

Principal companies involved: BIG, NACO, Arup, Magnolia Quality Development Corporation Limited (MQDC), Changi Airport Planners and Engineers, Influit, WT Partnership

Total investment: \$240 million to \$500 million

“The forests that cover the highlands are allowed to flow from the arrival plaza through the airport all the way to the tarmac. Tropical trees provide shade for travellers, and the forest courtyard lines the main functions of immigration, security, and luggage.

“The airport architecture is composed of modular mass timber frames providing flexibility and expandability, resembling a stylised mountain range at a distance.

“Upon closer inspection, all the mass timber members are carved and coloured according to traditional craft, adorned with three types of dragons representing the past, present, and future of Bhutan. The result is traditional yet avantgarde, forward-reaching and rooted.

“For me personally, this unusual embrace of traditional craft and colour is a true testament to how affected I have been by my encounter with Bhutan, the country, its culture, and its people.”

Harmoniously blending into the surrounding natural terrain, the arrival plaza is designed as a series of four zones each dedicated to specific plants found within the forests in Gelephu.

A gathering space features paving made from local natural stone and integrated seating areas, while abundant greenery and a canopy provide protection from the elements.

Bhutan’s biodiversity corridors are pulled into the airport and its interior courtyard. Aptly named the Forest Spine, the courtyard divides the terminal into two sections, with domestic flights on the west side and international flights to the east.

Visually accessible from anywhere in the airport, the Forest Spine offers travellers a connection to nature even inside the airport, with tranquil green spaces, a treetop walkway, and indigenous fauna.

According to the design team, every aspect of the Gelephu International Airport is a celebration of Bhutanese culture, showcasing regional craftsmanship including Shing-Zo (carpentry), Par-Zo (carving), Lha-Zo (painting), and Tshar-Zo (traditional weaving techniques).

The traditional Bhutanese carvings extend from exterior to interior. Designed to instill mindfulness into the often-stressful experience of travelling, the airport is bathed in natural light, with a grand triple-height entry, expansive floor-to-ceiling windows, and skylights.

Indoor and outdoor lounges will provide tranquil spaces for yoga, gong baths, and meditation for travellers to recentre and recharge, embodying Bhutan’s values of happiness and psychological wellbeing.

BIG notes that the airport’s layout is driven by passenger experience and operational efficiency. Intuitive wayfinding through clear visual cues and thoughtfully designed circulation paths ensures a smooth journey from arrival to gate.

Gates will be situated on the upper level alongside retail and food and beverage areas, offering expansive views of the apron and the dramatic Himalayan landscape.

“For the Gelephu International Airport, we wanted to create an experience that feels deeply Bhutanese – calm, welcoming, and connected to nature,” says BIG partner, Frederik Lyng.

Gelephu Mindfulness City Special Administrative Region is described as “a visionary initiative to build a world-class and vibrant economic hub in southern Bhutan, centred on mindfulness, sustainability and innovation”.

Located along Bhutan’s southern border with India, the city is focused on eight priority sectors that range from aviation and logistics to spirituality, green energy and technologies, finance and tourism.



Lean and green

It has been a summer of sustainability firsts with airports across the globe demonstrating their green credentials, writes Joe Bates.

Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport's (WSI) inaugural Sustainability Strategy demonstrates how Australia's first greenfield international airport in more than 50 years has embedded sustainability into its design, significantly reducing its carbon footprint, while charting a path for a net zero airport future.

Sydney's new 24-hour global gateway has secured two key partnerships that are pivotal to realising this vision, with CleanPeak Energy set to support the delivery of 100% renewable electricity for the airport precinct, while Freightquip will supply and operate an almost entirely electrified GSE (Ground Support Equipment) fleet covering the full scope of airport operations.

Airport CEO, Simon Hickey, said embedding sustainability into the gateway's design and construction had set it up for success and helped ensure WSI will soon be powered by 100% renewable electricity.

Federal Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government, Catherine King, said Western Sydney's new airport was designed with sustainability and future proofing in mind, inside and out.

She enthused: "As you step into the beautiful, air-conditioned terminal, watch your bags roll away at check-in, and scan into your first flight at Western Sydney International Airport, each of those steps will be powered by 100% renewable electricity.

"We didn't want to limit sustainability to the terminal, that's why we've ensured this new airport is SAF ready, with facilities in place so jets can be refuelled with locally produced biofuels."

The comprehensive energy system partnership with CleanPeak Energy will include the management and operation of WSI's existing rooftop solar (that has capacity to produce 4.5MW (megawatts) of electricity,

capable of powering 40% of the terminal) and the installation and management of an additional 9MW rooftop solar energy system that will gradually be built at WSI's Cargo Precinct.

CHANGI'S SUSTAINABLE NEW SATELLITE GATE

In line with operator Changi Airport Group's sustainability efforts, the new satellite gate at Singapore Changi Airport is designed as a zero-energy facility powered entirely by its rooftop solar panels.

Electricity generated by the panels is stored in an off-grid battery system nearby, reducing reliance on the airport's power supply and supporting more energy-efficient ground operations.

The satellite gate is also equipped with smart building features. Air-conditioning is automatically activated based on real-time flight information to ensure that the facility is ready to serve ahead of flight crew and passenger use while optimising energy consumption.

CAG's executive vice president for engineering and development, Koh Ming Sue, said: "As we continue to enhance Changi's infrastructure, we are integrating environmental sustainability features and smart technology into new developments to reduce carbon emissions, strengthen operational resilience and improve service efficiency."

Preparations to ensure operational readiness are currently underway, with use of the gate for selected flights set to commence by August 2026.

SOLAR POWER LEADERSHIP

Turkey's iGA Istanbul and Dalaman airports both celebrated major solar power milestones this summer.

iGA Istanbul Airport has become the world's first mega-airport to meet 100% of its electricity needs from solar energy, thanks to its new €220 million Eskişehir Solar Power Plant.



While Dalaman is believed to have become the first airport terminal globally to meet 100% of its electricity demand solely through rooftop solar installations.

iGA Istanbul Airport CEO, Selahattin Bilgen, noted that sustainability is not a secondary aspect of its operations, but rather its core foundation.

He stated: “We are now able to meet 100% of our electricity needs within our scope from solar energy. This means one of the world’s largest airports is powered entirely by 100% renewable electricity – a first in aviation history.”

Dalaman Airport’s solar success is as equally impressive following the completion of Phase 2 of its rooftop solar power project.

The installation generates more than 20,000MWh of renewable electricity annually, avoiding approximately 8,500 tons of CO₂ emissions each year – equivalent to the environmental benefit of around 380,000 trees.

CUTTING CARBON EMISSIONS AT BHX

Birmingham Airport (BHX) has achieved Level 4 status in ACI’s Airport Carbon Accreditation (ACA) programme.

The latest figures show that its location-based greenhouse gas emissions fell by 11% during 2025/26, despite a 6% increase in passenger numbers.

Continuing its long-term downward trend, the UK airport reduced its annual emissions by 798 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent over the past year to a new low of 6,455 tCO₂e.

The latest savings were achieved through a combination of energy efficiency improvements, renewable energy generation and lower-carbon fuels across airport operations.

The new fuels include the use of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) for ground support vehicles. Made entirely from renewable waste, this green diesel alternative improves local air quality and slashes carbon emissions by 90%.

CLEANER FUELS AT SALVADOR BAHIA AIRPORT

Salvador Bahia Airport in Brazil has taken another important step in its sustainability agenda by expanding the use of cleaner fuel in aircraft operations.

Since December 2025, two daily flights departing from Salvador have been operating with a mixture composed of 10% pure SAF and 90% conventional fossil fuel, the highest percentage ever made available in Brazilian aviation.

This operation is expected to continue until December 2026, aiming to meet the targets established by the Future Fuel Law, which foresees a minimum adoption of 1% SAF from 2027 onwards.

According to the gateway, this initiative strengthens its decarbonisation strategy and will help ensure Salvador Bahia maintains its lofty Level 5 status in ACI’s Airport Carbon Accreditation programme.

Alessandra Reis, environmental manager at VINCI Airports in Brazil, said: “This initiative is aligned with VINCI Airports’ global commitments, which have clear goals to reduce emissions by 66% by 2030 and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, contributing to the environmental transformation of the aviation sector.”

HYDROGEN HUB EDMONTON

Edmonton International Airport (YEG) is progressing its decarbonisation efforts through a hydrogen diesel dual fuel pilot project for runway snow sweepers, marking a first of its kind application globally.

The initiative is testing the integration of hydrogen into existing diesel engines to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and fuel consumption while maintaining operational performance in challenging environments.

“This is about taking real, practical steps to reduce emissions in some of the most demanding parts of our operation,” noted Myron Keehn, president and CEO of Edmonton International Airport.

“By introducing hydrogen dual-fuel technology in equipment that operates in extreme winter conditions, we are demonstrating that innovation and sustainability can go hand in hand.

“YEG is proud to serve as a real-world testbed for solutions that can be scaled across the aviation sector and beyond.”

Business exchange

We provide a snapshot of the latest news stories from companies that support the growth and development of the world's airports.

WOWING PASSENGERS IN PORTLAND



The second and final phase of the globally acclaimed Portland International Airport (PDX) main terminal expansion is now open. Designed by ZGF for the Port of Portland, the one million-square-foot project is the largest public infrastructure project delivered in Oregon's history and realises a decade-long vision to create a more welcoming, sustainable, and distinctly Pacific Northwest gateway for travellers.

Since phase I opened in 2024, the terminal has received multiple international honours, including the Prix Versailles World's Most Beautiful Airport award, Fast Company's Best Design in North America distinction, and recognition from the Holcim Foundation for Sustainable Construction.

Featuring a nine-acre mass timber roof, the terminal evokes the feeling of walking through a Pacific Northwest forest. Views of the airfield, abundant natural light, and interior landscapes that celebrate the beauty of the region are present at every step of the passenger journey.

The second phase introduces a distinct arrival experience for passengers landing at PDX. New exit lanes on the north and south ends of the terminal streamline concourse connections, leading arriving passengers to a new descent to baggage claim. Expanded post-security gathering areas create comfortable spaces for welcoming arriving travellers, while skylit all-user restrooms, new local retail and dining options, and art installations complete the passenger experience.

"This airport is designed to meet the needs of travellers today while adapting to the demands of the future, enabling it to serve the region for decades to come," stated ZGF's managing partner, Sharron van der Meulen.

Arguably, the project's sustainable design sets a new standard for airports worldwide. The main terminal expansion doubles passenger capacity while achieving a 50% reduction in energy use per square foot with a highly efficient, all-electric ground-source heat pump. While resilient design strategies enable the terminal to withstand a 9.0 magnitude earthquake in the Cascadia Subduction Zone.

MENZIES AVIATION SIGNS SAF MOU

Menzies Aviation has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with FlyORO Technologies Pte Ltd to support the distribution of sustainable aviation fuel (SAF).

Menzies will use its experience in fuel operations and its footprint of more than 16 airports in Europe to support the management of FlyORO's AlphaLite blending solution.

The aim is to enable more compliant and efficient blending, storage and delivery of SAF at or near airports, helping more airlines access sustainable fuel. The partnership supports Menzies' focus on helping the aviation industry reduce emissions by improving fuel infrastructure and expanding access to SAF.

Its executive vice president for fuels, Marco di Mario, said: "Our role is to keep aviation operations running safely and efficiently. As SAF becomes more important, we want to support its growth by ensuring it is handled safely and in compliance with industry standards.

"We look forward to working in partnership with FlyORO, and helping facilitate SAF that are accessible, compliant and cost-effective."



AWARD WINNING CONCESSIONS PROGRAMME

Midway Partnership, in collaboration with the Chicago Department of Aviation (CDA), has been awarded the Richard A Griesbach Award of Excellence in Airport Concessions by ACI North America (ACI-NA), the highest honour recognising outstanding airport concessions programmes.

The award recognises Midway Partnership's comprehensive redevelopment of the dining, retail and passenger amenities programme at Chicago Midway International Airport, which has transformed the traveller experience while delivering meaningful economic impact for the City of Chicago.

"Midway International Airport is an essential gateway for Chicago, and this national recognition reflects our continued commitment to investing in world-class amenities that serve residents, visitors and the broader community," said Mayor Brandon Johnson. "Through this partnership, Midway is delivering a concessions programme that celebrates Chicago's local businesses, creates jobs and ensures that travellers experience the very best of our city."

Midway Partnership – a joint venture comprised of Vantage Group, SSP America and Hudson – has invested more than \$75 million to transform



the airport's concessions offerings, bringing more than 70 new dining and retail brands to Midway and expanding the total concessions area from approximately 40,000 to 70,000 square feet.

The redevelopment has prioritised iconic local Chicago brands alongside national and global retailers, creating a strong sense of place for the more than 22 million passengers who travel through Midway each year.

NEW TECH PARTNER FOR PERTH AIRPORT



DXC Technology will be responsible for the design, integration, testing and commissioning of more than 70 information technology and operational systems that will support the new terminal at Perth Airport.

The new terminal facilities, scheduled to open in 2031, will realise Perth Airport's One Airport vision to bring all commercial airline operations into a single central location which will improve efficiency and enhance the passenger journey.

"We're extremely proud to partner with Perth Airport on a technology transformation that will support Western Australia's long-term economic growth," said Robert Le Busque, president, for Asia Pacific Japan at DXC Technology.

Perth Airport forecasts that by 2046, it will support 30 million passengers annually, generate more than 75,000 jobs, and contribute A\$17billion to the Western Australian economy.

ASSAIA SOLUTION FOR NEW CHITOSE AIRPORT



Assaia's AI-powered turnaround management solution ApronAI is being deployed across the international terminal at Japan's New Chitose Airport by Hokkaido Airports Co (HAP).

Facilitated by Marubeni Corporation, the partnership marks the first fully Japanese-supported implementation of Assaia's flagship technology. It also marks the first full-scale deployment of a computer-vision-based turnaround management solution in Japan.

Assaia's chief commercial officer, Jan Willem Kappes, said: "HAP recognises the value of real-time operational intelligence in helping airport stakeholders respond faster to developing issues on the ground and create more resilient operations."

The system, which is scheduled to go live in the winter of 2026, will also introduce full Japanese language support for the first time, allowing frontline teams to work directly within the platform in their native language.

WONDERWALL UNVEILED AT MANCHESTER AIRPORT

Manchester Airport has launched a suite of brand-new digital billboards across the airport's newly renovated and expanded Terminal 2.

The state-of-the-art screens, introduced in partnership with media and entertainment group Global, provide advertisers with new opportunities to reach more than 32 million inbound and outbound passengers.

Manchester Airport's £1.3 billion revamp of Terminal 2 now introduces a 4K HD 'Sky Screen' with full motion and dynamic capabilities stretching five metres wide, plus 15 premium small and large format displays throughout the terminal.

The addition of the new screens takes Global's advertising inventory to a total of 68 digital screens across the airport and 31 classic posters, including Europe's largest advertising site in an airport – The Wonderwall.

Nicole Guerretta, Global's director of partnerships for transport and business development, said: "The expansion of Terminal 2, alongside a major investment in new digital screens across the space, creates a powerful opportunity for brands to connect with audiences at the moment their journey really begins.

"People arrive at the airport in a receptive, ready to spend mindset, open to what's around them. Coupled with a fast paced and engaging retail environment, and a mix of large format, full motion and 4K screens strategically placed throughout the terminal,



brands can show up in that moment and be part of a passenger's journey from check in through to departures and back again when they return."

Manchester Airport is the UK's third busiest airport, and the largest outside London. A ten-year transformation has enhanced the airport's capacity and services to meet the needs of its evolving traveller base.

DUBAI AHEAD OF THE GAME WITH VERTIPORT

Dubai has achieved another first with the world's first purpose-built commercial vertiport receiving regulatory certification for electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircraft operations.

The green light for Skyports Infrastructure's VDX vertiport from Dubai's General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) paves the way for the future commencement of commercial Air Taxi services in Dubai.

Duncan Walker, CEO, Skyports Infrastructure, said: "This certification is a defining moment for Advanced Air Mobility, demonstrating that the infrastructure, operational standards and regulatory frameworks required for commercial eVTOL services are now a reality.

"With VDX now certified and construction of the wider Dubai Air Taxi Network progressing at pace, we are one step closer to launching commercial air taxi operations, and unlocking a new era of safe, efficient and sustainable urban transport."

VDX will serve as the first and primary hub within Dubai's planned Air Taxi Network, with three additional vertiports currently under development.

The network and vertiports are being developed by Skyports in collaboration with Dubai's Roads and Transport Authority (RTA).

VDX includes two dedicated take-off and landing areas, rapid charging infrastructure for electric aircraft and high throughput passenger facilities.



The four-storey facility spans approximately 3,100 square metres and can accommodate up to 170,000 passengers annually once commercial operations commence.

MISHANDLED BAGGAGE STILL COSTLY FOR INDUSTRY

Aviation's digital transformation efforts saw mishandled baggage rates drop by 23% in 2025, according to the SITA 2026 Baggage IT Insights report.

It reveals that the mishandling rate fell to 4.9 per 1,000 passengers last year, but despite the improvements over 24 million bags were mishandled, which cost the aviation industry \$6.3 billion.

What changed in 2025 was not one technology, says SITA, but a shift in how systems connect: real-time data sharing, AI routing, biometric bag drop, and connected passenger devices.

"Baggage is shifting from a logistical problem to a digital service," said Nicole Hogg, SITA's portfolio director for baggage.

"Passengers expect to know where their bag is at every moment, and they're increasingly willing to help us track it.

"The next phase is about bringing the technology we already have to every transfer, every handler, and every airport, offering greater visibility and connecting every step of the journey. That's how the industry earns the trust passengers now expect."

The report also notes that across the longer term, mishandling has fallen by close to three-quarters since 2007.

Transfers remain the core mishandling driver at 39% of cases in 2025, down from 41% the year before.

SITA believes that the trajectory is clear with three in four airlines planning to invest in AI over the next two years and more than half intending to give passengers real-time baggage updates.



David Lavorel, CEO at SITA, said: "Airports are operating closer to their physical limits every year, and the answer isn't always more concrete.

"Data, AI and predictive operations let us get more out of the airport we already have, at check-in, security, the gate, on the apron and in baggage halls. Baggage shows the formula works."

The SITA 2026 Baggage IT Insights report is available at [SITA Baggage IT Insights](#).

DNATA TO CONTINUE JOURNEY AT AMSTERDAM SCHIPHOL

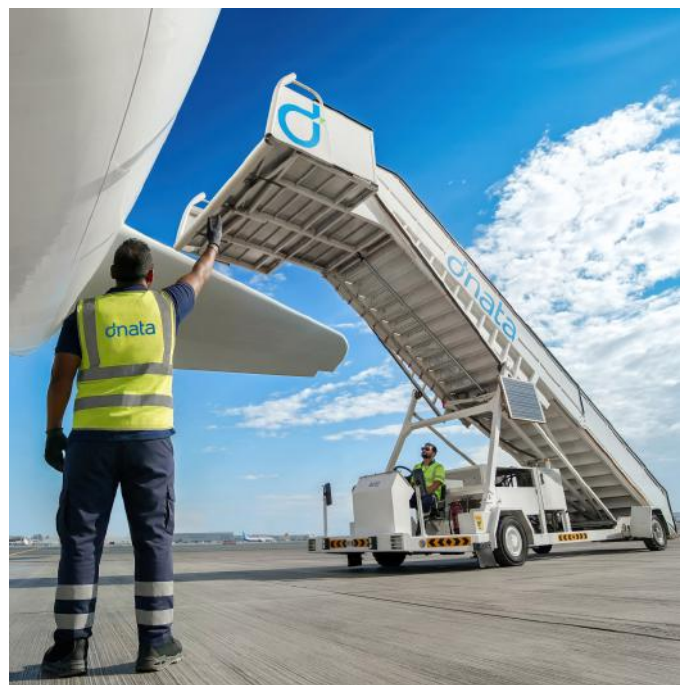
Global air and travel services provider dnata has renewed its ground handling license at Amsterdam Schiphol Airport (AMS) in the Netherlands.

The award follows a competitive public tender by the airport operator and enables dnata to continue providing ground handling services at AMS for the next seven years, as Schiphol moves into the next phase of its ground handling operations.

It has provided passenger, baggage, ramp and cargo services to a diverse portfolio of major international carriers and specialist operators for more than a decade.

The company currently supports more than 20 passenger and cargo airlines at Schiphol, with a team of over 1,200 employees handling approximately 500,000 tonnes of cargo and around 16,000 flights each year.

"Schiphol is a critical hub in European aviation, and this is an important moment for the airport's ground handling community," stated Thiemo van Spellen, dnata's managing director for the Netherlands.



PEOPLE matters



Why trust matters

Terri Morrissey and Richard Plenty consider the importance of trust in the workplace.

Does trust matter when we work with others? This is the question we posed at an invited symposium in the International Association of Applied Psychology conference in Florence in July 2026.

Imagine a travelling world where you could rarely trust your baggage to arrive safely; or repeatedly missed your connections because the timetables were unreliable; or where security staff did not bother to turn up for work thus creating long queues.

We take it for granted that organisations will honour their commitments to us in most of our interactions with them. Mission critical organisations such as hospitals, transport, doctor's surgeries, water and energy supplies are based on delivery expectations that all of us can rely on. They have systematic processes and procedures which help them to deliver consistently.

When these organisations run efficiently and smoothly, it is also because people working in them can be trusted to deliver on their promises.

There are unwritten codes in many cases which make all of these activities possible, and provide the key building blocks of an efficient and effective society.

In an organisational context, these constitute the psychological contract between employer and employee. This (often unwritten) set of mutual expectations drives high performance. Both organisations and employees can feel let down and disappointed if they feel their trust is misplaced, the contract is broken, or expectations are not met.

Trust which is based solely on contractual arrangements and legal agreements, and where financial or other forms of penalty are the only incentive for performing, are rarely sufficient for organisations seeking to deliver outstanding results.

This transactional approach can be inflexible and is rarely as effective in delivering truly high performance as relationship-based trust, where delivery is based on mutual understanding and fundamental principles on which the parties share and agree.

Relationship-based trust takes more effort and requires more time to build than transactional trust. It requires getting to know people, empathy, and appreciating each other's perspectives to build strong bonds that are based on mutually agreed understanding.

ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Denver International Airport has named **Dave LaPorte** as its interim CEO following the retirement of **Phil Washington**. LaPorte, the airport's chief operating officer, will officially take over on August 3.

Queenstown Airport has appointed experienced infrastructure and capital delivery leader **Mike Simmers** to the newly created role of chief of infrastructure. Airport CEO, Shane O'Hare, said the appointment is an important milestone for the organisation and reflects the company's investment in its leadership.

Ferroviair Airports has appointed **John Morton** as its new CEO, effective from September 2026. He will succeed **Luke Bugeja**, who is retiring after more than five years in the role.

Shawn Streck will become the new airport director of the Sioux Gateway Airport/Brigadier General Bud Day Field in September.

Genuine trust is based on relationships built over time. Trust is built step by step and reviewed regularly. Delivering on the promise moves things forward. Credibility and likeability of the parties in the relationship can make a difference.

Consistency of approach – knowing where you stand and what you stand for – is key. It means being as honest and transparent as possible in our dealings with others. Trust, once lost, takes time to build back. But being able to say what we can't commit to is as important as being able to say what we can commit to when circumstances change.

Being aware of our limitations and boundaries and being able to communicate them to others can set expectations in a realistic and achievable manner.

The effort is worth the investment. Over the longer term, high levels of trust make a difference to how well we work together, the quality of relationships and ultimately the quality of outcomes. It is important for maintaining commitment and flexibility through uncertain times.

And more importantly, it is a precious part of what we value in human relationships and continued social cohesion.



About the authors

Terri Morrissey and Dr Richard Plenty run ACI's Human Resources training. They received a Presidential Citation from the American Psychological Association in June 2022 for their leadership in advancing global psychology. Contact them at info@thisis.eu

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WEBSITE STATISTICS (MONTHLY)

May 2026



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unique users



73,709
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countries

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Features



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Analysis



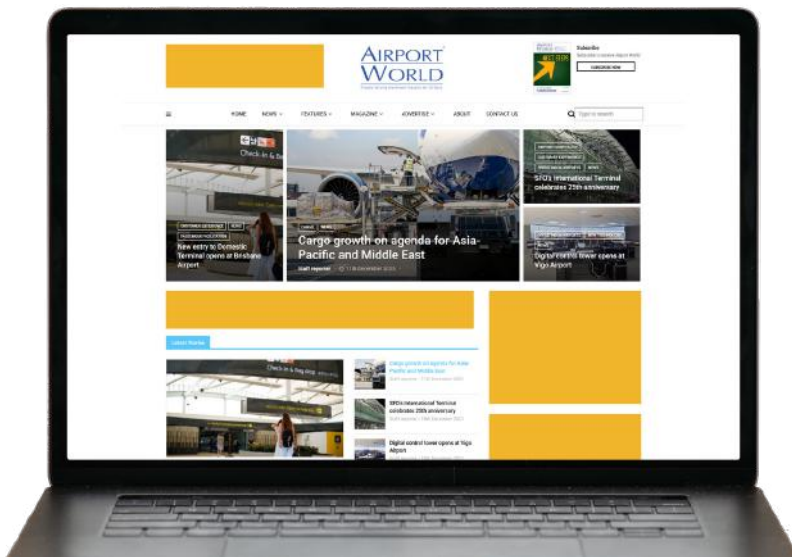
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