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Four L.A. mayors attend opening of Bradley terminal additions at LAX

Grand opening is held for new passenger gates and other improvements. Former Mayors Richard Riordan, James K. Hahn and Antonio Villaraigosa join Mayor Eric Garcetti at the event.

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Photos: Opening of Tom Bradley International Terminal at LAX



Photos: A look at the new Bradley International Terminal at LAX



By Dan Weikel and Michael Finnegan
September 18, 2013 | 8:02 p.m.

Four mayors, three of whom struggled for years to modernize Los Angeles International Airport, were guests Wednesday at the grand opening of five new passenger gates and other improvements designed to vastly enhance the foreign travel experience at the nation's third-busiest airport.

Richard Riordan, James K. Hahn, Antonio Villaraigosa and current Mayor Eric Garcetti attended the ribbon-cutting for the new south concourse and grand central hall at LAX's Tom Bradley International Terminal, which is undergoing a \$2-billion overhaul.

It must have been deja vu for Villaraigosa, who attended a similar celebration in June to show off the remodeled

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With the latest improvements, the Bradley terminal now has eight gates in operation that can handle the next generation of large jetliners, such as the giant Airbus A380, which can carry 400 to 800 passengers.

Airport officials hope the terminal improvements will help LAX once again become a world-class hub and overcome its slow recovery of international travelers, which peaked at 17.5 million in 2005.

Last year, LAX handled 17.1 million foreign passengers, about half of them at the Bradley terminal. Other major airports in the United States have recovered their international air travelers faster than Los Angeles. Some have exceeded their previous peaks.

The new terminal also faces some head winds, including lower than projected demand for the huge Airbus A380. LAX now serves a lower number of the planes than originally forecast. Though additional A380s are expected to be added in the next several years, uncertainty still surrounds how many will go into service at the airport.

In remarks to invited guests and world travelers passing by, Garcetti paid tribute to the former mayors for the part each played in the modernization of LAX, ignoring, for the occasion, the lurching nature of airport progress.

Riordan's ambitious master plan that called for at least 90 million passengers a year ran into community opposition and was never finalized before he left office. Hahn's equally ambitious effort was stalled by lawsuits and security issues raised by the federal government.

The plans languished in court until Villaraigosa moved to settle the lawsuits in 2006 with a compromise that called for projects that were acceptable to airport officials and the surrounding community.

Hahn and Riordan were left off the speaking program. But Riordan said in a brief interview that he was honored to be included. He also joked that the point of staging two openings of the same building might be "to have the current mayor show they can put on a better show than the last mayor."

Garcetti, setting competition for the limelight aside, saved his kindest words for Villaraigosa, calling him "a man whose name adorns this pavilion here, and who is responsible in large measure, more than anybody else, for making this day possible."

Later, on a walk through a duty-free shop, Garcetti explained the thinking behind the dual openings.

"It was still wrapped up a little bit in June," he said, recalling that much of the building was a construction site when Villaraigosa's dinner gala took place. "It was, I think, an important milestone to do a pre-opening, because Mayor Villaraigosa was so involved. But today's the day it actually opens."

terminal shortly before he left office.

On Wednesday, he returned to the Bradley terminal's grand atrium that now bears his name — the Villaraigosa Pavilion. This time, however, it was his successor's turn to tout the terminal, now the finest one at LAX.

"It's a great thing. It's so great we ought to do it twice," Villaraigosa joked as Garcetti prepared to take the stage for an event that would conclude with a Singapore Airlines Airbus A380 jetliner rolling through a giant ribbon.

The new gates, the grand hall filled with upscale concessions, a baggage claim area and expanded immigration facilities complete the passenger accommodations on the west side of the Bradley terminal, which was originally built for the 1984 Olympics.

Still in the works are nine gates on the terminal's east side, one gate on the north end, more concessions, airport lounges and reconfigured security checkpoints. Officials said the terminal and related projects could be finished in 2015, a year or two behind schedule.

"At last we have an international terminal worthy of the name," said Garcetti, who addressed hundreds of city officials, airline executives, business people and civic leaders at the ceremony. "Eight million passengers a year will now have the best first and last impression of the city."

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