

## Lindbergh Field looks at next steps after Miramar plan rejected

### More congestion likely, officials say

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In the final days of the Proposition A campaign, opponents of an airport at Miramar Marine Corps Air Station needed supporters with a live Web cam focused on the Lindbergh Field runway.

Slow activity at midday, they argued, undercut the idea that Lindbergh Field is in any danger of running out of room for additional arrivals and departures.

Had the camera shown the Southwest or United Airlines terminal waiting areas at another time of day, viewers might have gotten a different perspective. During morning peaks, every gate-area seat is filled, and lines at security checkpoints stretch out the door, said airport planning manager Ted Anasis.

“That’s really where the activity is,” Anasis said. “That’s where the congestion is very visible.”

As the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority ponders how to proceed after the defeat of its Miramar measure, it may surprise some travelers to learn Lindbergh Field already is over capacity in some areas. A shortfall of two gates, by the airport’s reckoning, contributes to the tough morning crunch inside some terminals.

Staying at Lindbergh may mean more gates and other improvements at San Diego International and a less flexible approach to scheduling commercial airline flights. The authority also is looking into improvements to public transit.

But airport officials say it will be a challenge to prevent a worsening of congestion. Backups on the runway and on Harbor Drive getting to the airport could become more common, too, they say.

Airport Authority President and CEO Thella Bowens said no one should expect the agency to maintain the convenience and smooth flow of Lindbergh Field in the next few decades if the airport reaches its capacity of 300,000 takeoffs and landings a year.

The master plan will add 10 gates at Terminal 2 for a total of 51. It is designed to accommodate an expected increase in annual passenger counts from 18 million to 22 million, but the authority has never thought its growth would end there.

The next step may be an alternative rejected when the Terminal 2 plan was adopted.

An alternative to the Terminal 2 expansion looked at the possibility of a new stand-alone terminal east of Terminal 1, with a gain of seven gates. That would take the total to 58, short of the 60 to 65 gates, the most Lindbergh Field could handle.

The same project could introduce a dual taxiway for aircraft, Anasis said, which would create more room for airplanes to maneuver and improve the efficiency of the single runway.

Elsewhere, New York’s LaGuardia and other airports have attempted to use “slots” to allocate takeoff and landing times to airlines. “It’s like buying a ticket to the movies,” said Bob Hazel, an aviation consultant. “It’s a pass to the airport.”

In practice, the system can work well for established airlines, Hazel said, while making it difficult or impossible for new airlines to come in. "It's not a clean system by any means," he said.

With or without financial incentives, Bowens said, it is hard to push airlines into off-peak hours.

"Nobody wants to fly in the middle of the night," she said. "Airlines really structure their schedules around the demands of their passengers. . . . The airline business is a very competitive one and trying to get any airline to move its flight away from the most competitive time is something we can't force them to do."

In the long term, Bowens said, the airport may look at a consolidated rental-car facility on the north side of the airfield, replacing the current multiple-bus system with a single bus or people-mover. There have been talks with the Metropolitan Transit System about an express bus from Old Town. A trolley extension remains hampered by numerous practical difficulties.

One issue that may stop the board from diving back into the capacity issue, authority board Chairman Joseph Craver said, is its own fate. State Sen. Christine Kehoe, D-San Diego, is holding hearings that could restructure the governance of the agency.

Kehoe said Proposition A returns show the authority "is out of touch with the public's thinking on this issue."

"The Airport Authority should probably stick to running the airport and leave the plans for a future airport to the next group," Kehoe said.

As might be expected, public reaction to the stay-at-Lindbergh vote was mixed.

"Lindbergh is going to be a continuing source of frustration for people who want to travel internationally," said Lou Kaplan, a retired Carmel Valley resident and former pilot. "For people who want easier connections, Lindbergh is going to become increasingly more difficult. . . . The physical facility is small."

Ann Alkire of Ocean Beach, who flies frequently for her work in publishing, said the airport is very convenient and she approves of the improvements introduced over the past few years.

"The airport functions very well for the travel I do," Alkire said.

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