

Press Office
City of Chicago, Department of Aviation
Nuria I. Fernandez, Commissioner



News Release

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THE CHICAGO AIRPORT SYSTEM 2006 YEAR IN REVIEW

CHICAGO - The Chicago Department of Aviation today summarized its significant accomplishments in 2006:

In April, the Chicago City Council approved Mayor Richard M. Daley's nomination to appoint Nuria I. Fernandez Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Aviation. As head of the Chicago Airport System, Fernandez currently oversees the management, planning, design, operation and maintenance of O'Hare and Midway International Airports.

This fall, Mayor Daley and the Department of Aviation announced that jetBlue Airways and South African Airways would begin commercial service at O'Hare Airport and that Virgin Atlantic and Austrian Airlines would resume service, bringing the number of major passenger airlines that serve O'Hare Airport to 57. O'Hare now ranks as the second-largest passenger gateway over the Atlantic, after New York's JFK, with nonstop service to 224 cities worldwide.

Also in 2006, the Department of Aviation launched a series of new initiatives aimed at enhancing the traveling experience:

- The first of nine multilingual, touch-screen "Virtual Concierge" work stations was installed in the baggage claim area of O'Hare's Terminal 3. The kiosk provides hotel, transportation and airport information in eight languages, including flight status and weather updates. The kiosk also provides information about City of Chicago events and attractions from the Chicago Office of Tourism and features a video welcome message from Mayor Daley. Each Virtual Concierge has four workstations from which travelers can access up-to-the-minute visitor information. Once users have identified a specific venue, location or service, they can simply touch the screen to dial the telephone number and pick up the receiver for a direct, free-of-charge connection. Once connected, users can make hotel a reservation, order a rental car or talk with an airport customer service representative.

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- In June, the Department of Aviation announced the opening of cell phone parking lots at O'Hare and Midway Airports for motorists waiting to meet arriving passengers. Cell phone lots enable motorists to temporarily park free of charge until friends, family members or business associates have deplaned, collected baggage and called to be picked up curbside. These convenient waiting areas eliminate the need for circling the airport repeatedly, ultimately resulting in less roadway traffic and congestion, less air pollution and increased auto fuel savings.
- In addition, the Department of Aviation announced the availability of a new baggage handling and check-in service located in Economy Parking Lot E at O'Hare. For a \$5.00 fee, domestic travelers can check-in their baggage, receive their airline boarding pass and seat assignment at a staffed kiosk, board the Airport Transit System (ATS) to the terminals and proceed directly to their gate.
- In December, the Department of Aviation launched an automated mail system at six security checkpoints at O'Hare Airport. The Mail Safe Express system provides travelers with another option to keep their personal items by choosing to mail them home securely via the United States Postal Service or United Parcel Service. The kiosks are a one-stop packaging, payment and vaulted drop-off station that allow passengers to mail items to domestic or international addresses or hold items at a secure location for pick-up upon return to the airport.

Last spring, the Department of Aviation held two full-scale emergency response disaster drills. The airports are required by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to hold a full-scale airport emergency plan exercise at least once every three years. More than 30 city departments and state agencies, ambulance and fire companies from surrounding suburbs, as well as operations managers and fire officials from airports throughout North America participated in the drills at both O'Hare and Midway to test emergency response procedures in the event of a major airfield incident.

In August, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced that the nation's threat level had been raised to orange for all commercial aviation operating in or destined for the United States. As a result, the Transportation Security Administration began prohibiting any liquids, including beverages, hair gels, shampoo, toothpaste and lotions, from being carried onboard aircraft. In addition to alerting passengers to expect immediate changes in airport operations, the Department of Aviation added extra and reassigned existing staff to security checkpoints at both airports in an effort to help coordinate lines and educate passengers about the recent changes to the prohibited items list. Chicago's Aviation, Police and Fire Departments, along with the City's Office of Emergency Management and Communications closely coordinated with federal officials as well as their counterparts in other major U.S. cities to share and coordinate the latest information.

In December, the Department of Aviation announced the completion of an arrestor bed system at the end of Midway Airport's Runway 31 Center. The product, Engineered Material Arresting System (EMAS), is a mixture of water, foam and concrete that crushes in a controlled manner under the weight of an aircraft and gradually stops its forward momentum.

The bed, which is located 35 feet from the end of the runway, varies in height from 6 inches in the front to 20 inches at the back and is 170 feet long. According to ESCO, sole manufacturer of the EMAS product, the system is designed to stop a B737-type aircraft if it were traveling at speeds up to 51 knots, or 58 miles per hour, when it exits the runway. The completion of the system was made possible through a \$15 million grant from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) that was awarded to the Department of Aviation last spring. Once the next FAA grant is awarded, Midway Airport will proceed with installation of arrestor beds at the remaining runway ends in the hope of completing the full project next year.

Also in April, O'Hare Airport unveiled its first "green" building. Chicago Fire Department's Rescue Building #3 features a 3,860 square-foot green roof designed to help improve air quality, conserve energy, reduce storm water runoff, reduce urban heat island effect, and serve as an insulated roof and a radiant barrier. The plantings, which include sedum and other groundcover, also provide an aesthetic benefit for ATS riders, who can view the green roof as they travel to and from the terminals and the remote parking lots. In addition, the firehouse roof features ten solar-thermo collectors that capture the sun's energy and heat the water circulated in metal tubes to provide hot water for the firemen who live and work within the building.

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The Chicago Airport System is self-supporting, using no local or state tax dollars for operations or capital improvements at O'Hare and Midway International airports. Together, Chicago's airports generate more than \$45 billion in annual economic activity and create 540,000 jobs for the region. Please visit www.flychicago.com to learn more about the Chicago Airport System.

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