

The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

San Jose airport makeover includes lots of high-tech amenities

By John Boudreau
jboudreau@mercurynews.com

Posted: 06/17/2010 01:07:04 PM PDT

Updated: 06/18/2010 05:34:05 PM PDT

A nearly completed billion-dollar-plus face lift has transformed Mineta San Jose International Airport, infamously known for having a terminal that resembled a bus station, into one of the world's most tech-hip airports.

The upgrades are both obvious and unseen, ranging from an abundance of power and USB ports embedded in specially designed chairs for always-on travelers to cutting-edge baggage X-ray machines below deck.

The end result is a gateway that represents the pulse of Silicon Valley. The new Terminal B, which replaces the 1960s-era Terminal C, will be completely open on June 30. Terminal A also received a makeover, giving the airport an entirely new feel.

Even the airport's public art evokes all things tech. The two-story "Space Observer" statue, a cross between a robot and a giant insect that records and displays video, dominates the mezzanine in Terminal B's departure hall. A hanging mobile made from hundreds of electrically charged glass panels — dubbed "eCloud" — simulates cloud patterns overhead in the terminal's new concourse.

"We consider this the most technically advanced airport in the United States," airport spokesman David Vossbrink said.

Boarding areas are designed to facilitate connected lifestyles. There are no frantic searches for power outlets or annoying sign-in processes to access free Wi-Fi. Passengers simply plug laptops and mobile devices into power outlets built into chair armrests, walls

and pillars.

"I've never been able to go online before at an airport," said Rebecca Elliott. She and her friend Megan Farley stared into glowing laptops after missing their flight to Las Vegas. The college students used the extra time to check e-mail and do other online chores before catching another flight.

A new digital paging system is being deployed. Flat-screen panels — energy-efficient "thin client" digital signs made by San Jose-based Wyse Technology — display text messages for travelers.

"We are in the heart of Silicon Valley and we thought we should take advantage of technology in every way," said Diane Mack-Williams, director of airport technology services. "It helps to improve our business processes, our partnerships with airlines and tenants, and reduces costs."

The airport, whose new Terminal B looks like a giant piece of modern art with an undulating facade, is outfitted with a multimillion-dollar network using Cisco Systems technology and VMware virtualization software that lets carriers seamlessly share ticket counters and gates. Instead of leasing a particular counter or gate, airlines now pay for just the time

Advertisement

HEARTLAND QUALITY
OMAHA STEAKS
SINCE 1917

SAVE up to 64%
Plus, get
3 FREE Gifts

Special Code: 45069ZWN

To Order: www.OmahaSteaks.com/print71 or call 1-877-586-4455

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

The Mercury News

MercuryNews.com

they use. Employees can log into any ticket counter or gate computer and instantly have access to airline reservation data and other information.

The system gives airport officials a greater ability to manage passenger and plane traffic. For instance, officials can shift planes to different gates because airlines now share all the gates instead of having ownership of just a few. If an incoming flight's usual gate is full because another plane's departure is delayed, the just-landed aircraft can be routed to another slot.

"We can move airlines in or out (of different gates) easily," Vossbrink said. "We can use any gate for any airline."

Running all systems on one network dramatically reduced the number of cables needed to be installed. And it means many procedures can be executed simultaneously — such as shifting an incoming flight to another gate while instantly communicating that change on display panels across the airport.

"It's the type of technology that is being looked at more and more by other airports," said William Heppner, principal tech consultant for Alaska Airlines.

The airport's tech backbone will enable it to adjust to new digital services airlines offer in the future, such as allowing passengers to board flights using a bar code displayed on a BlackBerry or iPhone.

"It provides a foundation that will allow us to go wherever technology goes," Mack-Williams said. "We now have that flexibility."

The technology upgrades also include body

scanners deployed at every security checkpoint by the Transportation Security Administration. In all, there will be 12 screening machines up and running after Terminal B opens.

New TSA-managed baggage scanning machines — the most sophisticated screeners being used in the United States — have been installed underneath the airport's two terminals. "It's like an industrial-strength CAT scan," Vossbrink said.

The baggage processing system requires fewer employees to handle luggage, thus reducing labor costs as well as potential injuries. "Every time you touch a bag, you increase the chance for injuries," he added.

Just across the street from Terminal B is the new parking garage and rental car facility. It has an integrated fueling network that allows each rental company to gas up vehicles from one system with pumps installed on three floors.

Atop the six-floor structure, which includes a 76,000-plus-square-foot mural of hands on its eastern side, are 3.4 acres of solar panels. The 1-megawatt system is enough electricity for up to 1,000 homes and will be used to provide power for the rental facility.

Contact John Boudreau at 408-278-3496.

Advertisement

Help people in need.
 Donate your car, boat or RV
Free Towing ■ Tax Deductible



FREE
 3 day vacation to over
 80 destinations.

Call Toll-Free
1-877-225-9384



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™