

# New Indianapolis Airport

## Paving the (Run)way for Better Image, Growth

By Matt L. Ottinger

**B**igger may not always be better, but size brings more amenities in this case. Culminating an expansion that was planned back in the 1970s, the new Indianapolis International Airport will open this fall featuring a 40-gate terminal building with the potential to expand to 100 (the current terminal has 34 gates), more concessionaires and restaurants and what authorities claim will be a “less stressful” travel experience due to an abundance of added space.

Simply walking into the main corridor leaves one with an impression that is starkly different from that of the current airport. Instead of being greeted by a congested sea of ticket counters, airport goers are privy to atrium-like surroundings lined with seemingly endless walls of windows. In fact, during a late morning summer walkthrough, the main floor of the facility was remarkably bright considering nary a light could be found. The Civic Plaza features a skylight 200 feet in diameter – the same dimension as the roof of the West Baden Hotel. The plaza is also pre-security so travelers can mingle with loved ones and friends before and after take-off.

While the concourses will be 1,300 feet long, the weary traveler needn't be burdened with extra walking as moving walkways will don the halls. The added space between concourses will also benefit the airlines, as it will allow them to leave their planes in Indianapolis overnight, rather than use the fuel to fly them to Chicago or another airport for storage.

The project is slated to cost \$1.1 billion. Roughly \$120 million of that is provided by the federal government, while the rest is collected in bonds from airlines and parking fees, according to John Kish, executive director of the Indianapolis Airport Authority. Additionally, no state or local





**An overhead photo reveals the proximity of the new terminal to the runways. This was designed to not only minimize traffic time for passengers, but also allow the airlines to save fuel.**

money is being used to finance construction or to repay construction bonds.

### **What's in this for the community?**

When considering an undertaking of this magnitude and at this cost, an easy question is "why?" Why commit these kinds of resources when the city already has a functional airport and what will it do for the state's business community?

According to Kish, the answer consists of two components – image and growth.

"We want to increase and improve the image of the city," he says. "This airport will serve as a beautiful new gateway to Indianapolis."

Mike Wells, president of REI Investments in Carmel, concurs.

"For most visitors, the first thing they'll see is our airport," says Wells, a former airport authority board member. "Whether it's subliminal or not, that will create their first image of the city."

The new airport's capability for new flights will also serve the community well, according to Kish.

"Enabling new growth in air service is another reason (for this project)," he says. "More direct flights will benefit business. Industries often mention proximity to a major airport when searching for out-of-state clients, and site selectors for conventions are always interested in what a city's airport can do."

**The spaciousness of the Civic Plaza allows passengers and non-traveling companions to congregate and patronize restaurants before takeoff, and the abundance of natural lighting will help save energy costs. While passengers have more area to cover, including 1,300-foot concourses and an expansive parking garage, moving walkways are prevalent throughout the facility.**

Kish explains that while 10 to 12 airlines operate out of the airport (the number has fluctuated recently due to turbulence in the airline industry), the new facility is built to accommodate future growth.

"Southwest recently added new flights to San Antonio and Austin," he says. "This indicates a comfort level with the project and shows us we'll be able to attract additional airlines."

Wells adds, "Its design is very flexible. This airport can accommodate new airlines and new flights, and if people want to change plans, the new terminal is flexible enough to move people around."

Adding non-stop flights will be ideal for the local business community, he stresses.

"What the business people want is to leave in the morning and be able to come back that night," Wells offers. "Non-stop flights are the way to make that happen."

The new airport will also be friendlier to international travelers, according to spokesman David Dawson, because they won't have to go first to a separate facility to accommodate for U.S. Customs processing.

"Instead of arriving in a separate building, international arrivals will now arrive directly into the main experience," he says. "Having a pleasant, quick international process will also be a plus in attracting big international conventions."

### **Spending to save**

The proximity of the terminal to the runways is expected to serve as welcome relief for passengers seeking shorter taxi times and airlines that, like the public at large, are combating soaring fuel prices. Kish explains it's been estimated that the airlines will save a combined \$12 million in fuel next year, and he asserts the reduced emissions will be more environmentally friendly.

The entrance to the new airport will reside on Interstate 70, not Interstate 465 as it does today. Those looking to park will be greeted by a five-level garage featuring 5,900 spaces and spanning 11 acres per floor (providing nearly four times the capacity of the current garage).





**Aesthetics were hardly ignored in the construction of the new airport, as \$4 million worth of art was commissioned. This mosaic — titled “Autumn Prairie Morning” by Dixie Friend Gay of Houston — covers an entire wall in the terminal.**

“We tried to make parking more convenient,” Kish asserts. “This will help people get to their flights on time. We were looking at the delivery convenience and comfort as well.”

A July 28 *Indianapolis Business Journal* article, “Airport seeks higher parking profits,” also reports the airport plans to cut its parking costs per customer, yet possibly gain a net of \$11 million more next year from parking (to \$40.7 million) due to the increase in available spaces. Dawson explains those numbers will depend on parking rates, which had yet to be set at the *BizVoice*® deadline.

In addition to the 5,900 spaces for customer parking, the garage will also feature 1,200 spaces for rental cars on the first floor and a 12,000-space surface lot located just west of the garage to accommodate economy and short-term parking. In the current airport, rental cars are found in lots that must be reached by shuttle bus and are located a quarter mile or more away from the terminal. Airport authorities contend this will not only save time for passengers, but it will reduce vehicular traffic and emissions.

Additionally, passengers will find another parking amenity at the new airport. A lot will be located near the entrance from I-70, where those who are making pick-ups can wait for a cell phone call from their passenger before heading to the terminal.

### **Securing the investment means securing travelers**

Kish explains the new facility will be the first major airport to be built from the ground up to include new, post-9/11 security requirements.

“9/11 impacted airlines by causing financial stress and

creating a whole new set of security concerns,” Kish says, noting that preparing for the threat of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and airline bankruptcies have also been challenges in building the new facility.

Kish states the new screening checkpoints will be significantly larger and will feature new technology that will help reduce stress and aid in generating a faster flow of people. Baggage screening upgrades have also been made, including new luggage scanners that cost roughly \$1 million each.

Another perk in the new facility will be separate checkpoints for passengers and vendors/employees, which authorities hope will speed up the security process. Kish contends this will help during Indianapolis’ unique busy travel times.

“Most airports have Thanksgiving as their biggest travel days, but we have Memorial Day,” he says, touting the Indianapolis 500 as an international attraction. “We’ll have more peak days with the addition of new races and the Super Bowl (in 2012), and this will test us. We’re already talking with other airports in the nation who’ve had Super Bowls (about how to cope with the influx of passengers).”

But Kish believes the new airport is well-prepared to cater to dedicated race fans of the future.

“Usually on the day after the Indy 500, we’ve had lines out the door,” he admits. “But that won’t happen in the new terminal.”

### **Taking care of business**

Not only is the airport hoping to attract more attention to the state, but some are using the airport itself as a means to bolster recognition and revenue. One concessionaire, the South Bend Chocolate Company, hopes to barter its sweet offerings for

sweet returns as travelers pass through its new airport location.

“The obvious value by being in the airport will be exposure to the Central Indiana market, as well as to national and international customers,” says South Bend Chocolate Company President Mark Tarner. “Many people give food as gifts, and Europeans specifically like to give chocolate. With the dollar not as strong, that could help us with those customers.”

While his company has 22 locations in Indiana, Michigan and Ohio, this is the company’s first in an airport. With a store already open on Indianapolis’ downtown circle, Tarner sees the airport shop as a complement.

“We’re one of the few family-owned Indiana companies on the circle,” he offers. “I think the airport store will serve as an extension of that brand – as Indiana’s chocolate company. We also use as many Indiana ingredients as possible so we feel that helps add to our Indiana feel.”

Tarner, who hopes his airport store can make \$500,000 to \$1 million annually, also believes his product will be unique in

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**John Kish, Indianapolis Airport Authority executive director, outlines the amenities found in the state capital’s new airport.**

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that chocolate can serve as a pacifier as “traveling can be stressful.”

Other Indiana-based businesses located inside the new airport will include the Indianapolis 500 Grill and Retail Store, Harry & Izzy’s, Shapiro’s Delicatessen and Vera Bradley, to name a few.

While local companies will be on display and passengers will benefit, Kish also explains the cargo business will remain a stronghold in Indianapolis. The current airport holds the distinction of being the eighth busiest cargo airport in the nation while ranking 42nd in passengers (serving over eight million passengers last year). FedEx alone employs 5,000 workers at the Indianapolis hub.

One local company that benefits from the airport’s cargo capacity is MD Logistics of Plainfield, which provides third-party logistics including freight service, packaging, warehousing and distribution services. According to president/COO Mark Sell, the verdict is still out regarding the new airport’s impact on his company.

“I don’t know how much it will impact us, because we deal mainly with the cargo facility that is adjacent to the airport; that’s off site and separate (from the terminal),” he says. “Theoretically, I don’t see any drastic changes for us.”

However, Sell does explain the new airport could possibly create benefits in the future.

“From a sheer image and reputation perspective, it could potentially attract new business opportunities down the road, and that would be exciting,” he surmises. “And if it brings in more international traffic, it could benefit us greatly – if that indeed occurs.”

The airport itself plans to add approximately 100 new staff people to accommodate for the larger facility. Kish says these new positions will include custodians, skilled trades and more guest services workers.

For those hoping to catch an early glimpse of the new project, the airport authority will host Community Days, an open-house weekend on October 11-12.

The airport was originally slated to begin operations on October 28. However, the opening was pushed back to November 12, the day after Veterans Day, as it was decided in July that the new terminal building would be named after Hoosier World War I pilot Col. H. Weir Cook.

Kish says the project will serve the city and state well now and in the future. “We felt we did well by staying on budget, and this airport has decades of growth built right into it.”

### INFORMATION LINK

**Resources:** John Kish, Indianapolis Airport Authority, at (317) 487-9594 or [www.newindianapolisairport.com](http://www.newindianapolisairport.com)

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