

San Diego International Airport: Action Begins Now

By Alan D. Bersin

San Diego International Airport has had a long history at Lindbergh Field. Now is the time to coalesce around a broad and deep understanding of what the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority must do to address our region's aviation future, in terms both short and long, and the place of Lindbergh in that future.

Moving from Analysis to Action

The controversy surrounding the airport has been with us for more than 50 years, and has often left us in a state of paralysis. The Airport Authority aims to change that in 2008 and replace the debate with an action plan. We are engaging the community in a dialogue about elements of a long-term solution, and will begin making proactive decisions that will set the stage for that solution. We must begin investing in the airport now to meet short-term needs; otherwise, we will pay an enormous price not too far down the road.

Today's airport has a \$9 billion annual impact on San Diego County's economy. It serves over 17 million passengers each year, and that number is steadily climbing. But despite constrained conditions today, our airport still rates as one of the best in the world in terms of customer satisfaction.

The current status, however, cannot deny the fact that there will come a time, as night follows day, when our airport by itself will not be able to contribute to the growth of San Diego County.

Our airport's single runway can handle approximately 300,000 landings and take-offs each year. Currently, we are at 220,000, and our planners expect the airport's "operations" limit to be reached sometime between 2015 and 2022. The airport's passenger volume is expected to grow from over 17 million today to 23 million by 2015. If we fail to take these increases into account as they occur year by year, we will begin to see the consequences of our lack of action well before 2015.

San Diego County will continue to grow, but the airport will be incapable of meeting the demand. We'll see longer ticket lines, longer security lines, limited flight selection and higher ticket prices. The airport's service level will deteriorate, and it will start directly affecting the economic health of the region.



Proposed dual-level roadway, showing separate levels for departing and arriving cars

We can't let this happen. But how do we move from analysis to action? That is where the Master Plan comes in. The Airport Authority has a three-phase Airport Master Plan addressing both the airport's immediate requirements and the region's long-term aviation needs.

Perhaps if we could turn back the clock, we would have chosen a different site for a major international airport. In 2006, however, voters decisively turned down a ballot proposition to move the airport to Miramar. What this vote ultimately means for us is that Lindbergh Field will remain an essential part of San Diego's aviation future. This is true, without question. We have no alternative but to invest in the current airport site in the short term (3-5 years) and mid-term (7-15 years) while we formulate a plan to meet San Diego's long-term (25 years or more) air travel needs. To do otherwise would expose our community to unsatisfactory service levels and to an erosion of the substantial benefits the airport brings to the regional economy.

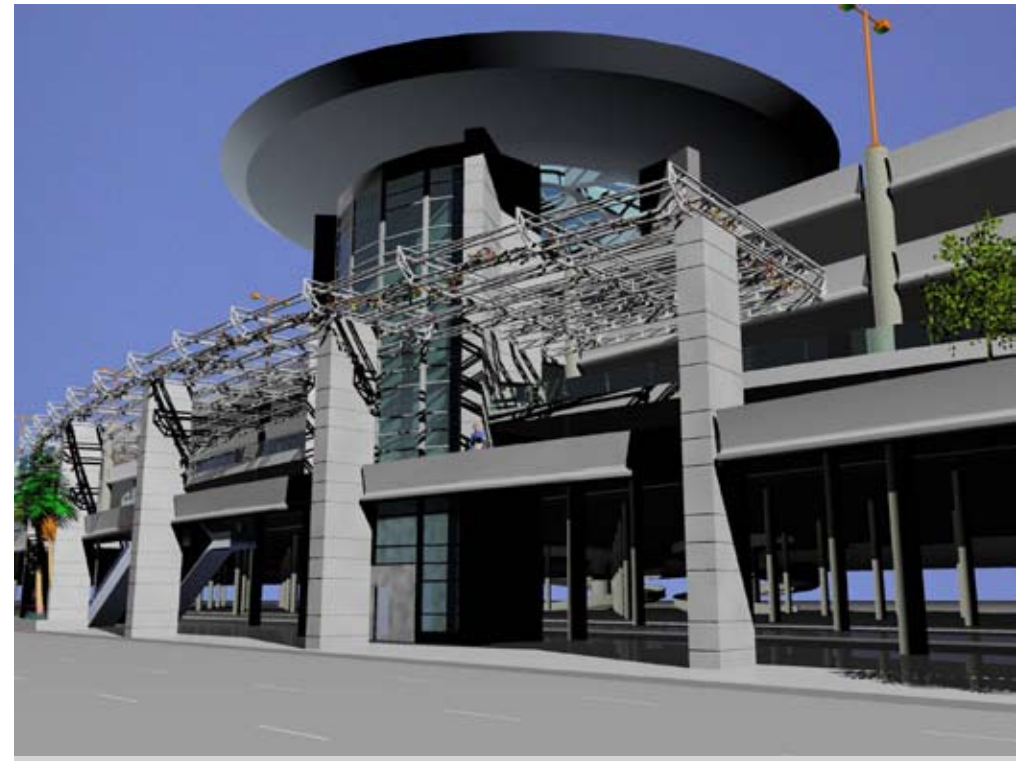
Meeting Short- and Long-term Needs

Phase 1 of the Master Plan addresses the airport's immediate needs, including new gates, new roadways and more parking. Phase 1 calls for 10 new jet gates at Terminal 2, a dual-level roadway that splits arriving and departing passengers to improve traffic circulation, increased parking and additional space for planes to park overnight.

Our planners are convinced, and they have convinced me, that if we do not make these improvements in the next three to four years, then by 2015 we will begin to suffer unacceptable consequences. What will happen is the service levels that we take for granted – the ease and convenience of a downtown airport, the quickness with which we get to the airport and get on our planes – all start to erode. Then we will start to see what is seen at other airports by those who travel around the country or around the world: long waiting times at ticket counters and security

checkpoints and, most importantly, we will start to see a diminution of service that airlines are able to bring to San Diego: more delays, fewer destinations, higher ticket prices.

The Phase 1 improvements are essential to ensure that our airport can continue to serve San Diego County passengers adequately. They are short-term improvements that will help us maximize operations today while we create, with the community's input, a viable long-term plan for San Diego County's aviation needs.



Proposed dual-level roadway in front of multi-level parking garage

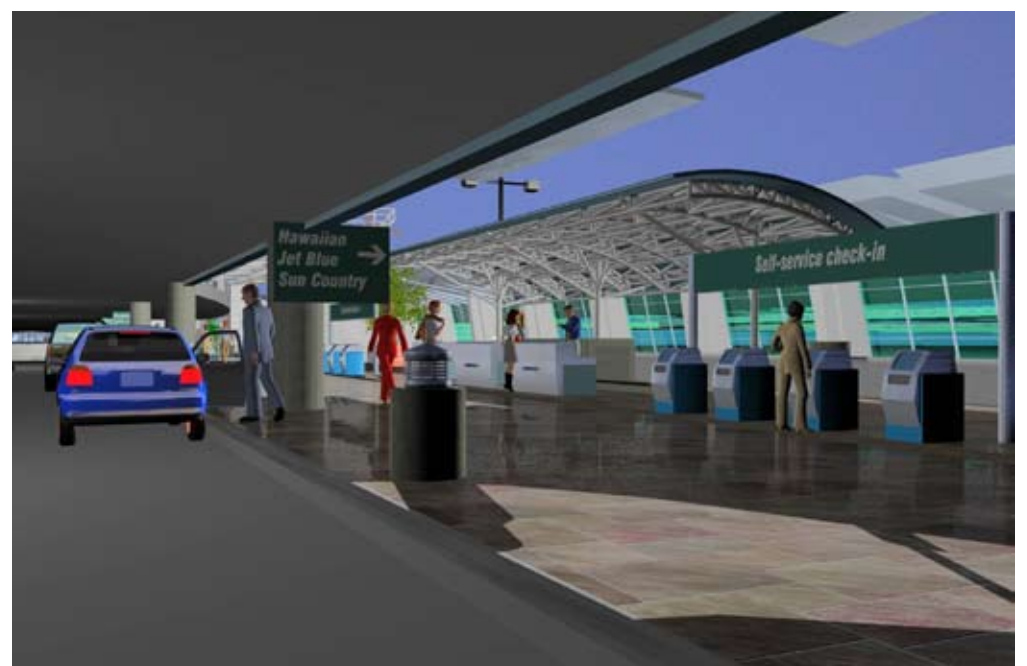
Let's Get Started!

That brings us to **Phase 2** of the Airport Master Plan, which has already commenced with a series of important dialogues with the public, including residents, city and county officials, civic leaders and organizations. We are looking at balancing services and facilities on the north and south sides of the airfield, as far as practicable. The most critical elements of this phase will involve traffic and access to the airport. Discussion items will include concepts such as a consolidated rental car facility, an intermodal transit center, direct access to the airport from I-5 and more. Phase 2 will involve a regional transit plan that seeks new ways to access the airport, including remote check-in facilities along major freeway corridors, direct bus service from Old Town and other improvements. Public comment and input will be an essential component of this phase, and I encourage all residents to get involved in the discussion.

Finally, **Phase 3** of the Airport Master Plan is all about supplementing Lindbergh Field's limited aviation capacity by coordinating aviation resources with other airports in the county and throughout the Southern California and Tijuana border region. We are not alone. Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties are in the same regional boat along with us. A long-term solution will likely be a regional plan involving other Southern California airports and modes of transportation, including high speed rail. We intend for San Diego to be a leader in this regional discussion.

We can only work through the three phases of the Airport Master Plan with the help and commitment of the San Diego County community. I urge all of us to begin thinking about how we can improve and expand our air transportation network in the San Diego region, now and into the future, in a way that finds common ground and avoids insistence on "all or nothing" solutions. That approach has kept us from doing anything in a concerted way for far too long.

The key to building civic capacity here begins with Phase 1. These are improvements we have to make to preserve what we cherish. Our community must make these small changes to set the stage and buy us the time for the truly massive changes to be made in Phase 2. Let's get started!



Proposed 'Smart Curb' check-in, allowing arriving passengers to check in for flights before entering the terminal