

D/FW wing set to take off

New terminal for international travelers opens in two months

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With just more than two months before flights begin arriving at Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport's newest terminal, some gates look as if they are already open for business.

Look left from the terminal's north concessions village, and you'll see a ready-to-go gate, with all of its roomy black upholstered chairs properly arranged.

Look toward the right, and you will notice a gate filled with unopened boxes of furniture. That's the latest look at Terminal D, the biggest piece of the airport's \$2.7 billion expansion project.

On Saturday, airport officials offered a sneak peek of the new terminal, its attached Grand Hyatt hotel and the new Skylink people mover train system to a group of 50 international and local journalists.

International travelers are an important audience for both the airport and its biggest tenant, Fort Worth-based American Airlines Inc.

D/FW and airline officials are hoping the new terminal and Sky-link train system will attract greater interest in the North Texas airport as a connecting hub for international travelers, who tend to spend more money as both visitors and as passengers.

For area residents, demand from international travelers translates into more nonstop routes to foreign destinations that couldn't be supported by area passengers alone.

Currently, international passengers can arrive in any one of three terminals at D/FW, adding expenses in redundant immigration facilities and personnel.

And depending on which gate you arrive at, connections can require lengthy terminal changes either on the airport's plodding train system or on a shuttle bus.

Terminal D will consolidate that international traffic to one terminal, offering quick and easy connections to any of the other terminals through the new Skylink train.

Saturday's tour of Terminal D was limited to one section — saving visitors the two-thirds mile walk from one end to the other.

The guests also rode the soon-to-open Skylink train system and visited the new \$60 million Grand Hyatt hotel, which is situated on top of the new terminal.

Mark Skjervem, D/FW's managing executive for the Terminal D project, pointed to key details of the building — such as the use of international symbols on each sign and examples of the \$6 million in artwork throughout the terminal.

Questions favored specific challenges and requests by international travelers. "Do us a favor and be the first U.S. airport to put a sign that says 'Welcome to America,' " pleaded one British reporter in the group, while in the sprawling immigration hall that houses 50 passport control stations.

"It's in the plan," Mr. Skjervem quickly replied.

The terminal bears striking differences to D/FW's existing 31-year-old terminals. With nearly 2 million square feet, Terminal D is more than twice as large as the airport's largest terminal — Terminal C— and can accommodate 15 million passengers a year.

In the international terminal, the horseshoe design used for D/FW's other terminals has been squared off — allowing for wide corridors and moving sidewalks to quicken trips.

Above, the blue-and-white Skylink trains can be seen arriving every two minutes in each direction, connecting the terminal to the other four in less than nine minutes.

At the pivot points are two massive atriums with ceilings that soar 72 feet and window panels that allow the facility to rely more on natural light during the day.

Its 40,000-square-foot concessions villages are positioned at the terminal's pivot points, giving travelers more choices in a consolidated area rather than having to continue around the next corner with your fingers crossed to see if there's a Starbucks.

Build-out work has only just started on the terminal's 60 retail spaces, which will soon be home to local favorites such as La Duni Latin Cafe, Cool River Cafe and Bachendorf's Fine Jewelry.

Each of the two-story concessions villages will also house a children's play area, and from the two pivot points, most gates will be within sight.

"We've tried to make the building as transparent as possible so getting around will be intuitive," Mr. Skjervem said.

