

WINDY CITY EXPANSION

ORD Pushing Forward On \$1.2 Billion Terminal 5 Overhaul

BY DAVID WARD



Above: When it formally opens in late 2021 or early 2022, the newly expanded Terminal 5 at O'Hare International Airport will feature 75 percent more space for passenger amenities and concessions.

The Chicago Department of Aviation (CDA) spent key parts of 2020 looking forward despite the pandemic, as it continued progress on the \$1.2 billion expansion of O'Hare International Airport (ORD) Terminal 5 (T5) that adds 350,000 square feet of additional space and 10 more gates.

The CDA completed the site/civil construction associated with the expanded aircraft aprons in July and commenced structural steel formation on the building in December as part of the project to remodel and reconfigure

substantial portions of the existing terminal.

"Work on this difficult project all mobilized during the initial months of the pandemic and is largely on time despite pandemic-related challenges," says Rob Hoxie, chief development officer, adding that 2021 will see more than \$1 billion in capital improvements by the CDA, much of that work on the new terminal.

Actual work on the T5 expansion began in 2019 and is expected to be completed at the end of this year or early 2022, despite the challenge of the last 12 months.

Key Elements

Among the highlights of the expanded T5 will be a two-story interior curtain wall made of glass panels on the East Concourse. The tinted panels depict lakes, shallow shores, city buildings, farmland and other highlights of the Chicago area while still allowing natural light to filter through, creating an open and airy feeling for passengers.

“Key points of congestion in the terminal, notably the international arrivals hall and passenger security screening checkpoint, will be expanded and reconfigured to reduce wait times, crowding, and congestion,” says Hoxie. “Overall space allocated to passenger amenities, including commercial spaces and passenger lounges, will increase 75 percent, versus the existing terminal.”

Many of ORD’s current carriers, including **Delta Air Lines**, **American Airlines** and **United Airlines**, are slated to move from their existing ORD gates to the expanded T5 for both domestic and international routes when it opens.

“Substantial investments are being made to expand Terminal 5’s ability to accommodate all international arrivals, until the future O’Hare Global Terminal (set to open in 2028) can be delivered, and for it to simultaneously accommodate increased levels of domestic activity,” Hoxie says. “O’Hare’s vision for the future will be to migrate Terminal 5 to the terminal of choice for airlines focused on carrying local passengers coming to or leaving from Chicago, regardless of whether the flight is domestic or international or whether it is on a large or small aircraft.”

Future-Proof Design

HOK and **Muller & Muller** are the architectural firms working with the CDA on the T5 design. William Jenkinson, regional leader of aviation and transportation at HOK, says the goal is to create an expansion that works in harmony with the current Terminal 5 architecture.

“The new T5 offers a greatly improved customer experience from curb to gate

with enhanced security, spacious gate lounges, upgraded restrooms and advanced technology to help transform O’Hare’s international gateway into a world-class experience,” he says.

The pandemic and resulting enhanced industry emphasis on passenger health and safety has triggered some changes in the original Terminal 5 design, Jenkinson says. “Much of the processing along the passenger journeys is becoming digital, touchless and biometric,” he says. “The pandemic seems to be accelerating technological advancement in these areas.”

Many of the design tweaks as a result of the pandemic will be especially evident in the areas around gates.

“In contrast to the low ceilinged, sometimes densely packed gate areas, our new lounges will have more space, volume, natural daylight and easy access to generous amenities,” Jenkinson says. He adds that restrooms in the expanded terminal are designed not only to be easier to clean but to allow for more spacing between guests and an increasingly touchless experience.

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Above: The new ORD Terminal 5 design allows for plenty of natural light throughout the concourse, lounges and gate areas, creating an open and inviting environment with views of the airfield and the Chicago skyline.

David Steele, senior architect at Muller & Muller, says T5's design will also provide airport officials with the ability to accommodate variations in the economy, flight schedules, and passenger type over time.

"Most gates are configured to accommodate multiple aircraft sizes, providing flexible usage of valuable and limited apron space," he says. "This allows the terminal to accommodate wide body international flights with aircraft as large as the A360, with seamless conversion to an increased number of gates for smaller aircraft typical of domestic and short haul flights."

Other new features include an expanded security checkpoint with almost double the capacity for passenger processing, a post-security marketplace with an enlarged and improved shopping and dining experience, and airport lounges with plenty of natural light and views of the Chicago skyline.

The CDA is also planning a new parking garage to replace existing surface parking,

which will yield 1,600 additional spaces adjacent to the terminal, and a new-state-of-the-art baggage handling system to replace the existing 25-year-old infrastructure.

"TSA bag screening will be enhanced with consolidation and equipment upgrades using the latest TSA standards and equipment," Steele says. "This will increase efficiency of bag sorting and delivery times and will also enhance security by bringing T5 up to the highest level of current bag screening processing and technology with the ability to be enhanced as standards are further improved in the future."

T5 Concessions and Amenities

With construction on schedule, Hoxie says the CDA is looking to release RFPs for the concessions in the expanded spaces early this year.

"The pandemic did impact the timeline, as CDA was concerned with releasing them earlier in 2020, as originally planned, because

of the burden that submitting a proposal might put on small businesses during the pandemic,” he says. “However, CDA has been encouraged by the robust response to smaller concessions RFPs it released in July 2020 and looks forward to reviewing the proposals for the new T5 spaces.”

Hoxie adds the RFPs will include provisions encouraging the maximum participation by minority- and women-owned businesses.

The CDA is keeping both the local business community and other Chicago stakeholders abreast of the project, as well as any new opportunities for small business at both ORD and **Midway International Airport (MDW)**.

“In addition to its partnership with Business Affairs and Consumer Protection (BACP), the CDA presents quarterly workshops to educate the public on the best practices in opening concessions at both airports,” Hoxie said. “In partnership with **Choose Chicago**, the CDA has also executed strategic marketing initiatives to promote Chicago’s airports’ connectivity, amenities, and modernization plans –



driving passenger satisfaction and economic activity. There has never been a more important time for CDA to partner with Choose Chicago to combine its efforts to restore traveler confidence and align strategies that can evolve as the travel climate continues to grow.” ■

Below: The Terminal 5 gates are now configured to accommodate multiple aircraft sizes, providing flexible usage of valuable and limited apron space, including the ability to handle everything from wide-body international aircraft to small domestic plane.

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