



PHOTO BY DAVID SPRAGUE

Loaded Down: Travelers with their baggage last week outside aging terminal at Burbank Bob Hope Airport.

PROGNOSIS: TERMINAL

Burbank airport renews effort for modern facility

By **MARK R. MADLER** *Staff Reporter*

The operator of Burbank Bob Hope Airport is once again trying to build a modern terminal – but this time it’s doing so in a new aviation era that has seen the Valley’s only commercial airfield lose flights and passengers.

The Burbank-Glendale-Pasadena Airport Authority is in the planning stages for a facility that would be about 50 percent larger than the existing 211,000-square-foot building that opened

more than 80 years ago.

Preliminary estimates put a price tag at \$300 million to \$400 million. But even at 355,000 square feet, the terminal would have the same number of gates – 14 – unlike past designs that sought to raise that number.

“This is an opportunity to bring something special to Burbank and make the airport a true gateway while preserving the charm and convenience,”

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said **Dan Feger**, executive director of the airport authority.

Safety is the primary reason for replacing the existing terminal, which does not meet current Federal Aviation Administration rules for proximity to the runways.

But in the past, attempts to build a new terminal were viewed with suspicion by the city and community, which equated the larger number of gates as a way for the airport authority to increase the number of flights.

In the past several years, though, flight traffic and passenger counts have dwindled at the airport, amid the recession and a move by carriers to consolidate operations at larger airports in order to keep planes full.

As a regional airport, Bob Hope provides non-stop service primarily to West Coast cities, but last year, **American Airlines** pulled its operations and **Jet Blue** and **Delta** shifted flights to other airports. Six commercial airlines operate from the airport with **Southwest Airlines** the carrier with the most flights.

For the first six months of this year, passenger numbers continued their decline and were off 4.2 percent to 1.9 million when compared to the already weak 2012 numbers.

The new terminal would include more of the amenities already at the existing terminal, such as restaurants, retail stores and kiosks, added handicapped accessibility and larger waiting areas. Air carriers at Bob Hope have requested space be set aside for a common use club room for first-class passengers.

Jack Keady, an aviation industry consultant in Playa del Rey, is not convinced that a new terminal will bring an infusion of new passengers, given that cost and convenience are the major factors determining where travelers fly from.

“It won’t get that many more passengers but it will play well with civic pride and make people happier,” he said.

Tortured history

As currently configured, the tails of aircraft parked at the gates are just 250 feet away from the center of one of the runways. Commercial airport standards call for aircraft to be 500 feet from a runway. In addition, a portion of the terminal is about 300 feet off the runway when standards call for 700 feet.

“Why play roulette every time a plane lands on that runway?” Keady said.

Proposals for a new terminal building have been raised off and on for decades. In the early 1990s, for instance, the authority board voted to build a new terminal with about 840,000 square feet, with the first phase to be completed by 1998.

By the early and mid-2000s, the authority was still proposing a large terminal with additional gates to serve more flights. This period involved considerable pushback by both Burbank city officials and residents, some of whom banded under the name Restore Our Airport Rights and questioned the need for more gates.

In 2000, the city council placed on a city ballot and voters approved Measure B, an initiative that requires public approval of expansion or relocation of the airport's terminal. The measure remains in effect and applies to the current proposal.

The authority board these days contains different members than 10 years ago and is not so set in its ways, Feger said. For instance, all three cities are in agreement to cap the terminal at 14 gates.

Another difference is improved relations with Burbank. In 2005, the two sides worked out a development agreement that put in writing what the airport could and could not do with its property. The agreement included a 10-year prohibition on a new or expanded terminal.

The authority, too, has improved its relations with the community, particularly Burbank residents. The dialogue is far less one-sided than in the past and the authority listens when the residents say they want a new terminal to contain the charm and convenience of the current one, Feger said.

A 2012 survey by **Goodwin Simon Strategic Research** in Culver City brought good news for the airport authority and city by showing 67 percent of the respondents favored a new terminal. The survey polled 1,111 residents of Burbank, Glendale and Pasadena.

Mike Nolan, a lifelong Burbank resident, agrees that the atmosphere is less bellicose and antagonistic than in the past. He said he would give the airport staff good marks for their presentations and making material on the terminal readable and understandable.

When he suggested that a map be made available showing the location of the new terminal, the airport authority had one out in a matter of days.

"They are giving good answers and not trying to baffle (the public)," he said. "The public is attuned to listening."

Modernization

The new terminal would be north of the current building on 49 acres of airport authority land previously owned by Lockheed Corp. The aerospace giant manufactured aircraft on the land during World War II and it was the site of the Skunk Works, which designed and built the U-2 spy plane, the SR-71 Blackbird and the F-117 stealth fighter.

An adjacent 22 acres of former Lockheed property was sold to a private developer and 58 acres remain in a trust until sold.

The new terminal would be a two-story building with all the passenger functions – ticketing, baggage claim, security, concessions and waiting areas – on the first floor and airport administration on the second.



PHOTO BY DAVID SPRAGUE

Now and Later: Top, artist rendering of airport development; above, terminal today.

Additionally, there would be features not in the current terminal such as a loading dock and a central air conditioning plant, Feger said.

The airport will retain its existing number of parking space with the new terminal – 6,600. Four thousand spaces would be adjacent to the terminal and the remaining 2,600 would be remote, including in the \$82 million regional transportation center now under construction and set to open next summer. Shuttle service would connect the transportation center, parking and rental cars with the terminal, Feger said.

The new terminal would be within walking distance of a Metrolink station being built on the Antelope Valley line that is scheduled to open in 2015.

Ideally at some point, Feger said, there will be a people mover to connect the train station to the terminal. “The decision to make that investment is a function of how many

people will want to use it,” he said.

Much, however, remains to be done.

Public meetings by the airport authority and the city have taken place the past two months to receive comments from community members. A joint meeting between the authority and Burbank City Council is scheduled for November to finalize details before beginning an environmental impact report, expected to take about a year to complete.

Nolan said the community meetings are proving valuable to the airport authority. He suggested room be made for concessions on the second floor to replicate the old Sky Room Restaurant from the 1940s and 1950s where people could eat and watch the airplanes take off and land.

“I admit it may seem nostalgic but I think it is something the community could relate to,” he said.