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IN THE SPOTLIGHT: **HOSPITALITY**

Issue 1, 2026

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Highs and lows

Editor, Joe Bates, reflects on the positivity of attending a major aviation event, the impact of conflict in the Middle East, and the hospitality theme of this issue.

It was good to catch up with many familiar faces, and meet some new ones, at the recent PTE World event in London, where optimism for the future was high on the agenda.

Having not attended the event for some time, I forgot just how big it is and how many airports attend and provide enthusiastic updates of how they are faring in the first quarter of Q1, 2026.

To be honest, the positivity was much needed as the ongoing conflict in the Middle East continues to cast a dark shadow over the region and, indeed, the entire world.

It has also once again shown just how vulnerable the commercial aviation industry is to geopolitical events.

Whatever the outcome, there's no doubt that the ramifications of the current conflict will be felt for years to come, and history will judge the actions of certain politicians and regimes, but what isn't in dispute is the impact the war has had on aviation in the region since it began on February 28.

Cirium reports that between February 28 and March 11 alone more than 46,000 out of the scheduled 85,500 flights in and out of the Middle East were cancelled.

The world's busiest international gateway, Dubai International Airport (DXB), along with Bahrain (BAH) in Bahrain, Hamad (DOH) in Qatar, Kuwait (KWI) in Kuwait, Nakhchivan (NAJ) in Azerbaijan and Abu Dhabi's Zayed International Airport (AUH) have all been targeted by drones.

The conflict continues to affect and suspend airport operations in and across Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

While rising fuel prices as a direct result of the conflict have led some airlines operating in other parts of the world to reduce their flight schedules and/or implement airfare increases.

Aviation is, of course, nothing but resilient, and the region's airports – which include some of the best and most high performing gateways in the world – will recover from the current disruption, it is just a question of time.

The aforementioned DXB, AUH and DOH airports are renown for their innovation, particularly when it comes to their adoption of new technology, customer service and hospitality.

You can read more about some of the ways airports are innovating in terms of customer service excellence in the 'hospitality' themed section of this issue of *Airport World*.

In the themed section we take a closer look at a host of pioneering hospitality initiatives; consider how multisensory design is enhancing airport journeys; and celebrate 2025's ASQ Customer Experience Award winners and Skytrax champions.

The section also contains features about airport lounges and how blending space, service and speed will play a key role in rethinking the passenger journey through airports.

The lead airport feature is on Antalya Airport, which has arguably just enjoyed the best year in its history during which it effectively doubled the size of its Terminal 2 and recorded an all-time traffic high.

Elsewhere in this issue, we have a special report on combatting organised retail crime at airports; the growth and development of autonomous vehicle fleets at airports; and navigating the legal complexities during the delivery of major construction projects.

We also have articles about the latest cargo security developments; FOD innovation; Ethiopia's planned new Bishoftu International Airport; baggage handling; parking garages; and solar power.

Our regular 'people matters' column and 'business exchange' section complete the issue.

AW

Hospitality service provider marhaba's Meet & Greet service at Manchester Airport in the UK.

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In this issue

Ambitious Antalya

New infrastructure, all-time high passenger numbers and a growing route network ensure that Antalya Airport has begun 2026 in good shape, writes Joe Bates.

Antalya Airport (AYT), the main gateway to the Turkish Riviera, handled a record breaking 39.2 million passengers and 229,000 flights in 2025.

The new high – which is 3% more than the 38.1 million passengers that passed through its terminals in 2024 and an impressive 10% up on pre-COVID 2019 when it welcomed 35.6 million travellers – is even more remarkable considering it has done so despite the loss of significant traffic numbers to its two biggest markets – Russia and Ukraine.

And the upward trend has continued into 2026 with AYT recording its highest-ever visitor numbers for January and February, which it says reflects the growing demand for cultural, adventure and eco-focused tourism to the region.

AYT's ability to bounce back and compensate for the downturn to two key markets says as much about the airport's development under operator Fraport TAV Antalya Airport as it does the attractiveness of its Mediterranean coast location.

Fraport TAV Antalya Airport – a joint venture between Fraport AG and TAV Airports which holds the concession to operate and develop AYT until the end of 2051 – has, for example, invested more than €865 million on enhancing the airport's facilities in the last three years alone, and continues to grow its route network.

The investment has effectively doubled the size of Terminal 2 and enhanced the airfield with the addition of new taxiways and 1.4 million square metres of apron to allow for parking for up to 202 aircraft.

Other facilities added as part of the first phase of the airport's investment programme have included a multi-storey car park, new connecting roads, aircraft maintenance hangars and a general aviation terminal.

"The new infrastructure enables us to meet the rapidly increasing demand for air travel to the Turkish Riviera," enthuses Dr Frank Quante, AYT's Fraport AG appointed general manager.

TRAFFIC GROWTH

As stated above, a best ever 39.2 million passengers used Antalya Airport last year as it recorded its fifth successive year of traffic growth.

The upturn in traffic has, in part, been driven by its recovery from the COVID pandemic which saw its throughput fall from 35.6 million in 2019 to just 9.7 million a year later, but the efforts of senior management and its route development team to expand AYT's connectivity cannot be underestimated.

As a result of these efforts, AYT's route network has grown from 86 airlines serving 176 destinations in 49 countries before the conflict in Ukraine to 96 carriers flying to 230 destinations in 52 countries today.

These include newly introduced routes to Milan, Aarhus, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Cairo, Riyadh and Jeddah by SunExpress, Pegasus, Flydubai, Etihad Airways, Air Cairo, Flynas, Flyadeal and Saudia respectively.

Having said all of that, AYT's TAV Airports appointed general manager, Deniz Varol, admits that "seasonality" is probably the biggest challenge to the airport's future growth.

He explains: "During the winter season, we have a daily average of 270 ATMs. In summer season, this average goes up to 910 ATMs.

"Together with our stakeholders, we must adapt operational resources to meet this fluctuation in demand, and it's not always easy.

"I believe that in past years we successfully managed to keep operational efficiency and passenger satisfaction inline, and with the new infrastructure we will be able to achieve significant gains on both fronts."

It was recently announced that AYT will host Routes Europe 2027, which according to Quante will give the airport a great opportunity to showcase itself to the world.

"Hosting this prestigious event will provide a valuable opportunity to engage with airline partners and industry stakeholders, showcase the strength of the Antalya market, and support the sustainable development of new air services," he enthused.

"We look forward to demonstrating the long-term potential of Antalya as a year-round Mediterranean destination."

While Routes director, Steven Small, said: "Routes Europe 2027 comes at a perfect time for the airport, having recently completed the first phase of the major expansion project.

"This significant investment has resulted in capacity for further traffic growth.

"With decision makers from over 110 of the region's leading airlines in attendance, I am confident that this event will unlock new opportunities, drive sustainable growth and solidify Antalya's position as a leading holiday airport in the Mediterranean region."

Antalya hosts numerous national and international events every year, with the 2026 calendar including the UN climate change conference COP31.

The growing recognition of Antalya as a world-class conference destination has further supported visitor numbers outside of the traditional high seasons.

For the record, the five largest markets served from Antalya in 2025 were Germany, Russia, United Kingdom and Moldova.

Last year's traffic total cemented AYT's status as Turkey's second busiest airport for international traffic after iGA Istanbul, which accommodates around a third of all passengers handled across the country.

NEW INFRASTRUCTURE

Located 13 kilometres northeast of the city of Antalya, AYT has three terminals that include the newly expanded Terminal 2, which has effectively equipped the airport to handle up to 65 million passengers per annum.

Completed in April 2025, the expanded Terminal 2 now covers a total floor area of 300,000sqm that has allowed the airport to almost double the size of the area used for handling international traffic and triple the size of its commercial offerings.

Indeed, AYT believes that the expanded terminal and new commercial facilities that include a new lounge, shops and F&B outlets have taken the airport experience in Antalya to another level.

Talking about benefits of its expanded Terminal 2, Varol said: "We are proud to have completed the massive expansion project in three years.

"This investment has significantly elevated the passenger experience and provided the capacity for expected growth.

"It has laid the ground for airlines to base more aircraft in Antalya and provided the necessary infrastructure to support the region's long-term development.

"Last year was about transition and fine-tuning. In 2026, we will see the full effect of the new facilities on passenger satisfaction and operational efficiency."

COMMERCIAL OFFERINGS

The JV is quick to note that new commercial offerings in the shape of lounges, F&B offerings and shops was a major focus of the expansion of Terminal 2.

The commercial revamp was spearheaded by BFA, a partnership between BTA (60%) and Fraport (40%), which in total has delivered 28 F&B outlets spread across 7,500sqm in Terminal 2.

The new F&B additions include the 'Taste of Anatolia'. Described as the "jewel in the crown" of T2's restaurants, the outlet opened in collaboration with the renowned Turkish chef Ömür Akkor and serves dishes that reflect the culinary heritage of the region.

Elsewhere in the terminal, ATÜ Duty-Free – a subsidiary of TAV Airports and Unifree Duty Free/Gebr Heinemann – operates the flagship main duty free store in the T2 extension.

In addition it operates a multi-brand fashion and accessories concept along with the Old Bazaar providing a wider variety of locally sourced food and souvenirs.

ATÜ also has two Arrival stores at T2 and plans to open future outlets in its piers, at which time the terminal will contain approximately 12,000sqm of duty free space.

The terminal also now has three lounges, each offering different levels of service (Comfort, Elite and Premium) that AYT hopes will appeal to all tastes and pockets.

Both the Elite and Premium lounges have access to a terrace and offer guests a butler service for their duty free shopping across the terminal. Visitors can also get food delivered to their table from any F&B point at the airport.

SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Determined to limit its impact on the environment, Fraport TAV Antalya Airport insists that its plan is to ensure the sustainable growth of the gateway over the next three decades.

"While we work to increase connectivity, attract new airlines and grow our base, we keep our focus on sustainability," says Quante.

"Antalya Airport's T2 International Terminal and T4 Domestic Terminal extension projects are registered for LEED Gold accreditation – one of the highest international standards in energy efficient buildings.

"The airport is already accredited at Level 3+ Carbon Neutrality status in ACI's Airport Carbon Accreditation programme, and we recently installed a 4-MW solar power plant as part of expansion programme."

NEXT ON THE AGENDA

In terms of infrastructure development, the second phase of the airport's master plan includes proposals for a new international terminal, with work on the project slated to begin in 2038.

It is anticipated that the new terminal will cost €165 million and raise AYT's capacity to 80 million passengers per annum.

And the JV is so confident in the continued and future success of Antalya Airport that it and its lenders have already signed the financing agreements for the long-term project.

AW

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All inclusive

Joe Bates takes a closer look at a host of new initiatives and services focused on making airport journeys easier and more enjoyable for all.

Not every airport might know it or even appreciate it, but they are very much in the hospitality business, and the better job they do at looking after their guests the better they may fare in terms of customer satisfaction, traffic growth and revenue.

When most people think of the hospitality business they invariably think about hotels, restaurants and entertainment venues, all of which are now commonplace at airports.

Entertainment? Today's airports regularly host music events and many boast museums, art galleries and exhibitions, while some have their own cinema, gaming venues, a rock-climbing wall and even an outdoor winter ice rink.

This article covers some of the ways airports have upped their hospitality game in the first quarter of 2026.

EMBRACING HOSPITALITY AT JFK'S TERMINAL 4

The operator of Terminal 4 at John F Kennedy International Airport has partnered with Hospitality Quotient to launch a comprehensive hospitality training programme for the thousands of employees who work at the terminal.

This partnership is in support of operator JFKIAT's T4 North Star programme, the strategic vision for T4 as the terminal undergoes a $1.5 billion transformation.

According to JFKIAT, the many components of this initiative will "evolve every aspect of T4 to stand as a truly world-class air terminal with an enhanced hospitality culture, achieving the Port Authority's larger vision for JFK Airport".

JFKIAT's partnership with Hospitality Quotient – a hospitality advisory from the team at Union Square Hospitality Group (USHG) – will focus on refining and activating the T4 State of Mind, JFKIAT's hospitality-centred training and engagement programme for all terminal employees.

The programme, says JFKIAT, will empower staff with key hospitality traits and behaviours that elevate daily operations, helping employees take pride in their roles, understand the difference they can make, and fully realise their contribution to the central mission of the T4 North Star.

Training will focus on setting a new level of service standards, strengthening emotional intelligence skills to provide authentic, personable interactions, and harnessing the power of the T4 community to deliver a seamless and welcoming experience to the nearly 80,000 passengers who travel through T4 every day.

Moving forward, JFKIAT and Hospitality Quotient will also work together on creating a model for future recruitment at T4, informed by the T4 State of Mind and the skill sets necessary for this new standard of customer service at the terminal.

"The T4 State of Mind embodies the core of our identity as a terminal, blending New York City's ambition and resilience with the T4 community's bold spirit of ingenuity," says JFKIAT CEO, Roel Huinink.

"As we continue to bring the transformation of T4 to life, our focus on exceptional service, authentic hospitality, and the strength of our T4 community will set a new standard for customer service."

While USHG founder and executive chairman, Danny Meyer, notes: "We've long known that the power of hospitality extends far beyond the restaurant industry.

"Thoughtful hospitality can transform every interaction into something meaningful and memorable. At JFK's Terminal 4, it is helping team members create moments of connection that passengers remember long after they reach their final destination."

HEARING AID AT FRANKFURT AIRPORT

Frankfurt Airport has become the first airport in the world to trial new Bluetooth enabled technology that broadcasts in terminal announcements directly to passengers' own hearing aids, earbuds and smartphones.

GN Hearing, the creator of the new Auracast technology, believes that it marks an important step towards making air travel less stressful and more inclusive for everyone, especially the almost one in five people – the equivalent of more than 1.5 billion people globally – who live with hearing loss.

Auracast broadcast audio is a Bluetooth capability that turns public sound into a direct audio stream that people can tune into with their own devices.

As a result, instead of struggling to hear announcements over background noise, travellers can simply connect and listen as if they were taking a phone call or listening to music on their personal device.

The new solution has been installed at gates A16 and A17 in Terminal 1 and will be trialled at FRA until the end of March. The trial is part of a Distr@l-funded digital-accessibility initiative. Distr@l is a public funding programme from the German state of Hesse that supports innovative digital projects and collaboration between research and industry. The project is led by Sitting Technologies together with Fraport and the Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences.

Alexander Laukenmann, Fraport's senior executive vice president of aviation, notes: "As the airport operator, we want our passengers to have a comfortable and relaxing stay at our terminals. By bringing clear, personalised announcements directly into passengers' own hearing devices, we are offering another attractive service to our customers while at the same time taking an important step towards a more inclusive airport."

TAV OPERATIONS PARTNERS WITH KEPLER CLUB

Hospitality provider TAV Operation Services (TAV OS) has signed a partnership agreement with Kepler Club, an innovator in technology-enabled rest solutions.

It states that the collaboration reflects a shared ambition to explore future airport hospitality projects that respond to the evolving and increasingly diverse needs of passengers worldwide.

The collaboration, for example, seeks to expand the range of airport hospitality offerings and "introduce new experiences that enhance comfort, wellbeing, and flexibility for travellers, while complementing and enriching existing airport hospitality environments".

Both partners believe that with travel patterns evolving, and passengers often facing short connections, long layovers or early departures, demand for flexible airport accommodation is growing as people look for practical ways to rest, reset, be entertained, and recover during their journey.

"Airport hospitality must continuously evolve to enhance the guest experience by anticipating changing expectations," says Aude Ferrand, CEO of TAV Operation Services and chief commercial officer of TAV Airports Holding.

"Covering the end-to-end passenger journey – from car park to lounge, including services such as porter, fast track, and meet and greet – we are pleased to collaborate with Kepler Club, an advanced technological concept positioned between a traditional hotel and a lounge.

"This partnership allows us to expand the hospitality offering with innovative solutions, while maintaining the right balance between technology and human connection."

Kepler Club's founder and CEO, Ömer Alaettinoğlu, said: "While sleep is a fundamental human need, today travellers are also seeking meaningful experiences, regardless of where they are.

"At Kepler Club, we aim to transform rest into a personalised, technology-driven experience. Partnering with TAV Operation Services provides a strong foundation to explore new projects globally, supported by shared expertise and a common focus on guest experience."

As part of TAV Operation Services' hospitality portfolio, Primeclass delivers airport hospitality through an experience-led approach designed around different traveller rhythms and dwell times.

The collaboration with Kepler Club, notes TAV OS, supports the evolution of this ecosystem by introducing complementary rest and recovery solutions that integrate seamlessly with existing lounge, refresh, and social spaces.

It says: "Rather than operating as standalone services, these concepts are envisaged as part of a cohesive hospitality experience – serving travellers with limited time as effectively as those with longer stays, while enhancing the overall attractiveness and functionality of airport environments for both guests and airport partners."

SAN DIEGO LAUNCHES SAN ASSIST

San Diego International Airport (SAN) has launched SAN Assist, a new programme designed to help travellers with non-visible disabilities feel more comfortable and confident when travelling through SAN.

These non-visible disabilities, it notes, includes conditions such as autism, chronic illness, sensory sensitivities or anything else that may make air travel challenging.

The programme offers personalised support and preparation resources to reduce stress and improve the overall travel experience, such as travel guides offering one-on-one assistance to support passengers on the day of travel.

It also includes pre-travel familiarisation tours of SAN that allow passengers to practice navigating the airport environment ahead of time, building comfort, and confidence before their trip.

"We are very proud to offer our SAN Assist programme to help all travellers feel supported and welcomed," enthuses Kimberly Becker, president and CEO of San Diego County Regional Airport Authority.

"By providing personalised assistance and advance preparation options, our goal is to help all travellers easily navigate the airport experience and ensure their experience is positive."

HAMAD AND SFO JOIN SUNFLOWER PROGRAMME

Hamad International Airport (DOH) in Qatar and San Francisco International Airport in the US have become the latest major gateways

to introduce the Sunflower programme that enables staff to discreetly identify and assist passengers with invisible disabilities.

Francois Bourienne, Hamad's senior vice president of commercial, strategy and customer experiences, said: "Guided by principles of autonomy, dignity, and predictability, Hamad International Airport continues to design passenger journeys that support diverse needs while maintaining clarity and consistency.

"The Sunflower programme forms part of HIA's broader accessibility framework, creating a barrier and hassle-free airport that truly serves everyone."

While SFO's airport director, Mike Nakornkhet, noted: "SFO is committed to making air travel more comfortable, accessible, and inclusive for all.

"Joining this global initiative helps ensure we can achieve that goal for travellers with hidden disabilities."

NEW LEVELS OF CARE AT KEMPEGOWDA

Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport (BLR) has introduced a new personalised passenger service brand it hopes will help it meet the evolving needs of modern travellers.

Called, 'Care by BLR' the new service is said to offer a comprehensive suite of assistance and premium support services that "enhance comfort and ease airport navigation" for passengers passing through its terminals.

Airport operator, BIAL, notes that Care by BLR portfolio includes Meet & Assist, Porter and Luggage Service, Valet Parking, Luxury Limousine, Arrival Lounge access and Flower Services across departures, arrivals, and transit.

It adds that the offerings are designed to support passengers at every touchpoint, "making travel through BLR more seamless, convenient, and experiential".

Commenting on the initiative, Kenneth Guldbjerg, BIAL's chief commercial officer, stated: "Passengers today seek more than just point to point travel – they want to feel cared for and supported from the moment they arrive at the airport.

"At BLR, the travel experience is shaped across multiple touchpoints, and Care by BLR brings essential services to these touchpoints under a unified, airport led platform that is simple to access and dependable to use.

"As passenger expectations continue to evolve, this approach allows us to deliver consistent, high-quality experiences while giving passengers the flexibility to choose how they travel through BLR Airport."

CELEBRATING RAMADAN AT IGA ISTANBUL AIRPORT

Doing something a little different this year, iGA Istanbul Airport celebrated Ramadan by transforming its terminals into an immersive Ramadan experience that blended Turkish culture with innovative digital installations, family-friendly entertainment and some seasonal goodies for passengers.

Central to the initiative were specially curated Ramadan Villages in both the Domestic and International terminals which featured a Tree of Unity (Digital Wish Tree), Ramadan Post Office, calligraphy workshops, paper marbling (Ebru) performances, and nostalgic carousels.

The Turkish hub believes that the popular initiative further strengthened its position as a global gateway that connects cultures while enhancing the passenger journey. AW

Easing the way

Multisensory design reduces passenger stress and creates a more welcoming terminal, writes Spectrio's Christian Armstrong.

As much as we would like to think otherwise, airports are often stressful places for travellers, especially those juggling time, paperwork, bags, kids and gate changes.

Enhancing the airport experience is therefore a key goal for most gateways and, arguably, is why so many airports are placing greater emphasis on the physical environment itself.

Even small environmental cues can raise or lower stress for passengers. The sights, sounds, lighting, and subtle signals that shape a terminal can influence how confidently people move, how quickly they make decisions, and how comfortable they feel.

By tuning those sensory elements with intent, airports can ease pressure, improve flow, and elevate the overall experience.

VISUAL GUIDANCE

One of the most effective ways airports can shape the sensory environment is through what travellers can see immediately in front of them.

In general, once people step into a terminal, they make rapid, instinctive decisions based on whatever feels easiest to follow, and that instinct gives airports significant control over how crowds move.

Travellers follow the hallway that seems obvious, the sign that draws their eye, the line that appears to be progressing.

Consistent colour systems let them read a concourse at a glance. Clear, distance-friendly icons help them spot key services without slowing down.

And wayfinding that stands out from the architecture – overhead signs, floor cues, lighting that directs movement – cuts the hesitation that leads to bottlenecks.

The strongest visual systems work in layers. Static signs and floor markings provide dependable anchors; architectural framing helps travellers anticipate where a path leads; lighting cues can reinforce direction.

Digital displays can add additional clarity by adapting to real-time conditions, redirecting people around bottlenecks, or flagging a less-crowded security lane before a crowd builds.

When all the visual elements reinforce one another, passengers don't have to parse competing signals or guess which direction feels right.

Placement is just as important as design. People tend to look straight ahead when they're rushing and slightly downward when they're stressed, which means cues need to sit where the eye naturally goes.

When signs, screens, and markers meet travellers in those sightlines, the whole terminal feels easier to navigate. It's less about giving people more information and more about making the right choice feel effortless.

AUDITORY ASSISTANCE

If you stand in any busy airport for a few minutes, you'll hear dozens of competing sound sources: rolling suitcases, food-court chatter, PA announcements, and the low hum of thousands of people moving at once.

While airports can't eliminate this noise, they can shape the overall tone, so the terminal feels more welcoming and less chaotic.

A coherent soundscape goes a long way in lowering the general temperature. Soft background music can set a steady emotional baseline, giving travellers something calm to lean on without trying to entertain them.

Clear, evenly balanced announcements matter just as much. When people can clearly understand boarding calls or gate changes the first time, the terminal instantly feels more organised and less stressful.

Zoning is another practical tool. High-traffic areas like retail corridors can carry a brighter, more energetic sound profile, while seating areas benefit from quieter, more consistent audio.

That shift in tone helps people settle into the rhythm of the space, moving with purpose when they need to or unwinding when they can.

Effective audio blends into the environment, giving the terminal a sense of order without ever demanding attention.

MULTISENSORY CUES

Lighting often sets the emotional temperature of a terminal long before travellers consciously register it. Diffused, warmer lighting in seating areas softens the industrial feel of large, open rooms and instantly makes waiting more enjoyable.

Brighter, more neutral lighting works better in movement zones like TSA queues, in the US, or ticketing halls, especially when paired with clear visual guidance that keeps travellers oriented.

Lighting systems that can shift between warmer and cooler light give airports a way to respond to the time of day, operational pressure, or extended delays without disrupting the space.

Scent can also have an influence. A clean, subtle fragrance in transitional spaces signals care and maintenance. Lounge areas with a gentle botanical note feel more restorative without tipping into anything overtly branded or heavy-handed.

What matters most is consistency. A sensory profile that shifts abruptly between zones or vendors confuses travellers instead of grounding them.

Small atmospheric details – conscious lighting, considered scent, and a clear visual language – create a rhythmic experience that passengers feel as they move from one stage of their journey to the next.

These touches don't require full architectural redesigns. They're atmospheric cues that signal quality and elevate the overall experience.

SMARTER TERMINALS

Multisensory design isn't about creating spectacle. It's about understanding how people react under pressure and shaping the environment in ways that make their path easier.

Clear visuals reduce hesitation. Thoughtful audio reins in the mental fatigue created by constant noise. Lighting and scent help soften an environment that can otherwise feel mechanical and overwhelming.

Each element plays a small but meaningful role in helping travellers find their footing.

When those cues align, the terminal becomes more comfortable to navigate. Flow improves, clustering eases, and passengers navigate with fewer questions and less uncertainty.

These shifts don't replace the need for long-term infrastructure planning, but they do make existing spaces work harder and feel better, both for the travellers moving through them and the teams working to keep everything running. AW

About the author

Christian Armstrong is vice president of products at Spectrio where he specialises in content management and the company's digital signage content strategy.

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Lounges matter

Aspire's David Collyer considers what the future might hold for airport lounges and the global traveller experience.

Global travel growth looks set to continue, with the airport lounge market valued at $4.9 billion in 2025 and projected to reach almost $6.3 billion by 2027.

But what's interesting is where that growth is coming from as the fastest-growing segment is upscale leisure, those expecting and willing to invest in elevated experiences.

Airlines are responding, recognising that outsourcing lounge operations to specialist hospitality partners can deliver greater quality, efficiency and flexibility than managing first and business class environments alone.

We've noticed an unprecedented demand from carriers who want us to elevate their offerings and deliver experiences that match their onboard proposition. Three major trends will shape lounge usage and traveller expectations in the near future:

– TECHNOLOGY IN HOSPITALITY

The hospitality sector is undergoing significant transformation, and airport lounges are no exception.

As terminals grow busier and guests increasingly seek a calm haven, technology will be essential to maintaining consistently high standards.

Drawing on best practice from 5-Star hotels, Aspire is investing in smart-lounge technologies designed to address two persistent pressure points: cleanliness and overcrowding.

Real-time occupancy monitoring, automated service triggers and predictive demand tools are becoming critical. The goal is not to digitise for its own sake, but to protect the guest experience – ensuring lounges remain well-maintained, even at capacity.

– CAPACITY PRESSURES

Despite huge growth, airport floorspace remains finite. This creates complex operational challenges. Guests are at the mercy of flight schedules and delays, often staying longer than planned or leaving and returning multiple times, making occupancy patterns increasingly unpredictable.

To stay ahead, lounges must adopt smarter layouts, flexible zoning and real-time management systems that allow teams to respond dynamically. Demand forecasting and thoughtful design will help maintain service quality, even as airports reach record volumes.

– EXPERIENCE OVER EVERYTHING

Travellers today are guided by experience. Price and convenience still matter, but when comparing the economics of a lounge visit with dining or waiting in the terminal, the difference is often marginal.

The value received far outweighs the incremental cost and this mindset is driving more guests into premium spaces.

Food and beverage is defining this evolution and the industry is being pushed to rethink how dining fits into the lounge experience. We're investing heavily in a complete redevelopment of our kitchens to ensure F&B sits at the very forefront of our proposition, as well as continuous team training to ensure operational excellence, consistency, and a genuine service culture across every location.

Sustainability will also influence almost every decision, from design to procurement. We've realised that partnering with local suppliers for materials and ingredients reduces transport emissions, strengthens community ties and creates a more authentic sense of place.

LOOKING AHEAD

Airport lounges of the future will be smarter, more sustainable, service-driven and precisely tailored to the needs of the modern guest.

The brands that successfully combine technology, hospitality and sustainability will help redefine the pre-flight experience for a new era of global travel. AW

About the author

David Collyer is global senior vice president for Aspire Executive Lounges.

Always innovating

***Airport World* discovers that lounge operators continue to up their game and invest in new facilities to meet growing demand from travellers that are looking to enhance their airport experience.**

It has been a busy year to date for the **Plaza Premium Group**, which has announced the opening or planned introduction of a number of new lounges, signed a partnership agreement with PT IAS Hospitality Indonesia, and launched autonomous wheelchairs to transport passengers around airport terminals.

Ever innovative, PPG started the new year in style with the launch of a Premium First Lounge (PPF) at Rome Fiumicino Airport and announcing plans to expand its lounge offerings at Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen International Airport to four facilities by the start of the busy summer season at the Turkish gateway.

The total will include the newly opened Plaza Premium Lounge Anadolu in Domestic Departures and a new international lounge created by upgrading the former domestic lounge. Next on the agenda for Sabiha Gökçen is a Plaza Premium First (PPF) lounge.

This was followed by the opening of a new Plaza Premium Lounge (PPL) at Dammam's King Fahd International Airport (DMM) in Saudi Arabia, and the debut of two new lounges, including its first PPF in the US, at Dallas Fort Worth International Airport (DFW).

In between the lounge openings in DMM and DFW, Plaza Premium Group and PT IAS Hospitality – a subsidiary of InJourney Aviation Services that specialises in premium airport hospitality solutions and operates executive lounges and inflight catering services across key airports in Indonesia – have collaborated to expand premium lounge access for passengers across Indonesia and worldwide.

Under the collaboration, customers of PPG's partners can access 26 lounges operated by IASH across Indonesia, while customers of IASH's partners can access up to 100 Plaza Premium Lounges globally.

"Southeast Asia is a key strategic market for our business, and Indonesia, as the largest economy in ASEAN and a fast-growing tourism market, presents a significant opportunity for growth," commented Song Hoi See, founder and CEO of Plaza Premium Group.

"We are excited to add IASH's lounges to our growing global lounge network. This partnership underscores our shared ambition to raise the bar for airport hospitality by offering a consistent, high-quality lounge experience for business and leisure travellers, whether departing from Indonesia or connecting through major international gateways."

Plaza Premium Group has also launched a new autonomous wheelchair service at Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) through its ALLWAYS brand to enhance passenger mobility services.

Its self-driving wheelchairs, part of a wider service expansion, are designed to navigate the airport, providing a modern, hands-free mobility solution for travellers needing assistance.

Elsewhere, *Zebra* has designed a new **Aspire Executive Lounge** at Copenhagen Airport. Commissioned by Aspire – the hospitality brand of Swissport International – the lounge design is said to be inspired by Copenhagen's reputation as 'The City of Spires'.

Indeed, Zebra says that its design integrates references to medieval and renaissance silhouettes, like the iconic copper-clad spires found across the skyline, and the modern Scandinavian ethos, coupled with an international perspective that defines the Danish capital.

Mia Tsujimura, associate director at Zebra, remarked: "Designing the Aspire Lounge in Copenhagen was an opportunity to craft a spatial narrative that resonates with both place and purpose.

"We drew from the city's architectural language; its skyline, textures, and tonal richness, to create a sanctuary that feels distinctly local yet globally relevant. Every detail was considered to create a calm sense of place for the modern traveller."

The distinctive shape of the city's spires, for example, has subtly informed design elements throughout the space, such as inspiring angular forms in shelving, lighting, and signage.

David Collyer, global senior vice president of Aspire Executive Lounges, commented: "Our new lounge at Copenhagen Airport reflects our commitment to well-designed spaces that deliver comfort, relaxation and a seamless experience for our guests, while embodying a sense of place and truly celebrating Danish culture."

Another operator enjoying a good start to 2026 is **Airport Dimensions**, which has opened new facilities in Indonesia, Hong Kong and Vietnam to significantly strengthen its presence in the Asia-Pacific region.

Building on a period of rapid growth that includes recent high-profile developments in Hong Kong (opening of a second Kyra Lounge), Jakarta (Blue Sky Premier Lounge) and Ho Chi Minh City (new Rose Business Lounge), in early March the company announced the official opening of the Blue Sky Premier Lounge in the International Terminal (T2) at Juanda International Airport (SUB) in Surabaya.

The new Blue Sky Lounge in Surabaya follows the successful launch of the Blue Sky Premier Lounge at Jakarta's Soekarno-Hatta International Airport earlier this year.

Indeed, Airport Dimensions believes that the Jakarta facility has become a benchmark for the partnership between Airport Dimensions and Blue Sky Group, pairing what it describes as "local relevance with world-class hospitality standards" to serve Indonesia's dynamic travel market.

Spanning 462 square metres and accommodating up to 101 guests, the new lounge at SUB is described as a sophisticated sanctuary that draws inspiration from Surabaya's identity as the 'City of Heroes'.

The design narrative is said to seamlessly blend Western influences, characterised by warm woods and muted heritage tones, with the elegant textures of Indonesian tradition, including framed batik that pays homage to the resilience of Kota Pahlawan.

Errol McGlothan, president of EMEA & APAC at Airport Dimensions, commented: "Aviation across Southeast Asia is growing rapidly, with secondary cities like Surabaya playing an increasingly important role in international connectivity.

"That growth brings a diverse mix of travellers – from early regional departures to long-haul connections, business passengers and families – placing new demands on the airport experience.

"Through our work across Indonesia and the wider Asia-Pacific region, we have seen first-hand how expectations are evolving: people want space to reset, quality food, areas to work, and environments that support every type of journey. This lounge reflects that understanding, responding to how people travel today while delivering the consistent global standards international passengers expect."

Airport Dimensions notes that the opening of the second Kyra Lounge in Hong Kong is designed to build on the award-winning launch of the original that was recently named the best Priority Pass lounge in Asia Pacific.

While in Vietnam, the company has celebrated the unveiling of the upgraded Rose Business Lounge at Tan Son Nhat International Airport in Ho Chi Minh City in partnership with SASCO.

And there's more to come in Vietnam following the recent announcement of a new lounge in development at Hanoi's Noi Bai International Airport. It is being delivered in collaboration with Vietnam Airport Services Joint Stock Company, Vietnam's leading airport commercial services provider.

The new additions to its portfolio mean that Airport Dimensions now has a presence at 85 airports across the globe. AW

All about **choice**

Errol McGlothan, president of EMEA & APAC at Airport Dimensions, explains how personalisation and premiumisation are reshaping the airport experience.

For a long time, the airport lounge was seen as the ultimate 'nice to have' – a quiet sanctuary tucked away behind a frosted glass door for a small number of frequent flyers. However, if you walk through a major terminal today, you will see a very different story unfolding.

At Airport Dimensions, we are seeing a fundamental shift in how people travel. The demand for high-end, customised environments is no longer a niche request; it is actively reshaping the entire aviation landscape.

Today's traveller has moved beyond standardised journeys and now expect to shape their own time at the airport, choosing experiences that reflect their needs in the moment. Premiumisation is no longer just a luxury; it is fast becoming an expectation.

This shift is driven by a significant change in passenger expectations across the globe. Data from our latest research, the AX26 report, shows that while the appetite for better services is a unifying factor, what people want depends heavily on who they are with and where they are travelling.

In the EMEA region, the willingness to invest out-of-pocket for a better experience is incredibly high. For example, 83% of respondents told us they would consider purchasing standard lounge access, while 77% are even looking for top-tier premium lounge options. Moreover, global travellers are interested in smaller, premium upgrades like high-end coffee shop concepts as they look for ways to make the airport journey feel like a highlight of their trip rather than a hurdle to be cleared.

This shift is not only being driven by travellers, who have learnt, both in their airport journeys and wider lives, to expect tailored services and products to suit their needs. It is also being accelerated as airports look for new ways to engage passengers and drive commercial growth.

As non-aeronautical revenue becomes increasingly critical, there is a growing focus on how to better connect with passengers and unlock value across the journey within pre-existing terminal space, negating the need for costly new infrastructure.

At the same time, airlines and banks are becoming more sophisticated in how they segment and reward their customers, raising expectations for more tailored, relevant experiences.

Together, this is moving the industry away from a one-size-fits-all model towards a more segmented, experience-led approach, where different traveller types, occasions and needs are actively designed for, not averaged out.

Whether it is a premium passenger in the Middle East or a leisure traveller in Europe, the expectation is consistent: greater choice, more relevance, and a sense of control over how time is spent at the airport.

The most effective airport environments are built around choice, offering a range of experiences that respond to different traveller segments, whether that be the economy traveller looking to escape the hustle and bustle of the concourse or a business traveller searching for privacy to conduct some last-minute work calls before they jump on their flight.

Within our own portfolio, this approach comes to life through a range of distinct formats. For travellers seeking privacy and a more refined, service-led experience, Clubrooms provide a quieter, more elevated environment. Our No1 Lounges offer a flagship experience that balances comfort, quality and style, while more informal, social concepts such as My Lounge appeal to those travelling in groups or with family.

Alongside this, we also work with airport partners to create bespoke spaces that reflect local identity and brand alignment within the airport.

Our offer has evolved over time, to move away from purely functional spaces, towards enhanced service models and improved food and beverages which reflect both local and international traveller tastes.

We are creating spaces for travellers which are more intuitive and more considered, which ultimately better align to their wider needs.

This reflects a broader shift in how airport experiences are being designed, with a more deliberate focus on hospitality and how people want to spend their time.

To truly understand why this segmentation matters, you need to look at how differently people spend their time and money.

We see a significant "spending culture" gap across different regions. In the Middle East, for instance, the airport is a hub of retail and atmosphere, with over 60% of travellers identifying shopping as a primary behaviour. In contrast, a traveller in Germany might be much more focused on utility and basic needs, where 40% of expenditure is directed strictly toward essentials.

Furthermore, the rise of the Affluent Leisure Traveller (ALT) has changed the game. While this group represents just 26% of travellers, they account for a staggering 57% of total airport spend. Globally, this group spends roughly four times more than other passengers, and they are looking for premium spaces that cater to their specific lifestyle.

This reinforces the need for a more tailored approach, rather than applying a single strategy across markets. Since 75% of these high value ALT's use the airport lounge, this forms a critical part of their experience of the airport and offers us an opportunity to tailor how these customers engage with the airport to maximise both their individual experience, and their spend, as we see a direct correlation between satisfaction and spend.

As the airport experience becomes more personalised, digital is playing an increasingly important role in how passengers discover, access and engage with services. It has the potential to connect fragmented touchpoints, enable more seamless journeys, and surface more relevant offers at the right moment.

In Saudi Arabia and the UAE, digital platforms are a huge motivator for spending and engagement, with roughly a quarter of respondents saying online services motivate them to spend more.

However, in European markets like the UK or Germany, travellers have been slower to adopt and engage with digital tools, with as few as 13% of German flyers believing these tools encourage them to spend.

There is a massive opportunity for European airports to make up this ground. However, what matters is how intelligently digital platforms are used rather than just their presence.

The future of travel will be defined by how well digital and physical experiences are connected, and how effectively they are used to respond to individual passenger needs.

AW

Spotlight on excellence

ACI World's ASQ Customer Experience Awards and Skytrax's annual World Airport Awards recognise customer service excellence. We review the results and winner reaction.

It could be argued that winning either an ASQ Customer Experience Award from ACI World or being a Skytrax champion is the ultimate endorsement of an airport's hospitality as it simply couldn't win one if passengers were not happy with almost every aspect of their airport experience.

Yes, the awards are totally different in their format and the way they are carried out. The fact that the ASQ results are based on passenger surveys taking place on the day of travel is without doubt hugely meaningful for airports, while the programme itself allows participants to accurately benchmark themselves against others.

But there is no denying that airports place huge value on the annual Skytrax Airport Awards, and celebrate their success in it widely and loudly, arguably much more so these days than they do their success in the ASQ awards.

ASQ AWARDS AND WINNER REACTION

While there are no great surprises around the winners of ACI World's ASQ Customer Experience Awards for 2025, arguably the fact that multiple airports shared the top accolades in the different categories showed the commitment of the world's airports to enhancing the passenger experience.

The awards covered all size of airports from the biggest to the smallest with the range of categories including airports with 'The Most Dedicated Staff' and those offering the 'Easiest Airport Journey' to 'The Most Enjoyable' and 'Cleanest' airport.

In total, 100 airports worldwide were recognised for excellence in passenger experience – *View the full list of winners* – between them collecting a whopping 195 awards.

In addition, eight airports were inducted into the ACI World Director General's Roll of Excellence, recognising their consistent delivery of top quality customer service over time.

The results come amid continued traffic growth, with global passenger volumes expected to reach 9.8 billion in 2025 and projected to rise to 10.2 billion in 2026 – placing increasing pressure on airports to deliver efficient, welcoming, and high-quality experiences at scale.

"Airports are demonstrating that passenger satisfaction can continue to rise despite growing pressure," said ACI World director general, Justin Erbacci.

"These awards reflect the collective efforts of airport teams and stakeholders worldwide.

"As we celebrate the ASQ programme's 20th Anniversary, we recognise two decades of trusted insights and recognition that have helped airports create better and more memorable journeys.

"Congratulations to all the ACI ASQ Customer Experience Award winners for their unwavering dedication to passenger experience."

Highlights of the 2025 ASQ Awards include the fact that new airports accounted for 35% of the winners in several of the award categories; that nearly 707,000 passengers were surveyed worldwide, in real time; and more than half of the world's air travellers passed through an ASQ-rated airport.

Also worthy of note is that Border and Passport Control recorded the largest satisfaction gains globally; and airport ambience and cleanliness were the strongest drivers of overall satisfaction.

The awards are sponsored by SITA, whose senior vice president of borders, Pedro Alves, commented: "Air travel is evolving at pace, with passengers expecting more seamless and rewarding experiences than ever before.

"These awards recognise the exceptional work happening across airports every day."

ACI World notes that the 2025 ASQ results show that passengers increasingly value clean, welcoming airport environments and smooth, human-centred interactions.

It adds that Improvements in Border and Passport Control highlight the critical role of frontline staff in reducing stress and uncertainty at key moments of the journey.

These findings align closely with insights from the ASQ 2026 Global Traveller Survey Report.

At the time of going to press, North American airports accounted for the bulk of the 2025 ASQ winners to contact us and celebrate their success, with Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (AUS), for example, citing the dedication of its staff for its award winning performance in the Best Airports at Departures by Size and Region category for airports handling 15 to 25 million passengers per annum.

"This recognition is a testament to the dedication of our entire AUS team and our partners who work tirelessly to enhance the passenger experience," said airport CEO, Ghizlane Badawi.

"As we continue to expand our infrastructure and modernise our airport, we remain focused on delivering a seamless, welcoming, and efficient journey for every traveller that passes through AUS."

In the Northeast of the country, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey has revealed that the highest ever satisfaction scores at LaGuardia resulted in it being named North America's best airport in its class for the third successive year.

"For three years in a row, LaGuardia has been rated North America's best airport in its class by the critics who matter most – more than 30 million passengers who rely on our new world-class airport," said Port Authority executive director, Kathryn Garcia.

"We worked diligently and thoughtfully with our partners at Delta Air Lines and LaGuardia Gateway Partners to design and deliver extraordinary new terminals, and we continue to work together to operate these terminals at the same exacting and high standards that customers deserve."

The airport earned an overall passenger satisfaction score of 4.38 out of five, which is 2.7% higher than its score in 2018.

Before LaGuardia's transformation, passengers in the same ASQ survey rated LaGuardia (LGA) as the worst airport in North America with a score of 3.54.

Elsewhere in the US, the 2025 ASQ Customer Experience Awards programme recognised Salt Lake City International Airport (SLC) with three "Best" awards as part of its annual programme.

Specifically, SLC was named as one of the Best Airports in North America at Departures by Size and Region (25-40mppa); Most Enjoyable Airport in North America along with Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport (GSP), and Orlando International Airport (MCO); and Cleanest Airport in North America along with Gerald R Ford International Airport (GRR) and GSP.

"Being honoured with an ASQ Customer Experience Award shows SLC's commitment to enhancing our passengers' experience," said Bill Wyatt, executive director, Salt Lake City Department of Airports.

"This recognition is shared with the many employees – from the airport to airlines to TSA and other tenants – who work tirelessly day in and day out to deliver a reliable, high-quality airport experience."

Equally happy is Dallas Fort Worth International Airport (DFW), which for the fourth-consecutive year has been recognised for its outstanding customer experience in the Best Airports in North America at Departures by Size and Region in the Over 40mppa category.

"Receiving this award for the fourth year in a row is especially meaningful as it coincides with the largest construction programme in our airport's history," said Ken Buchanan, DFW's executive vice president, chief revenue officer.

"Even as we modernise and expand, our commitment to delivering an exceptional experience never wavers. This recognition shows that our customers feel that dedication."

Reflecting on Ontario International Airport once again receiving the Best Airport at Departures in North America award (5-15mppa), CEO, Atif Elkadi, said: "What makes this recognition extraordinary is that it comes directly from the people we serve.

"Our team shows up every single day committed to delivering a world-class experience defined by care, efficiency and hospitality. This award belongs to the frontline employees, airline partners, custodial staff, and concessionaires who treat every passenger like a guest. At ONT, we don't take trust for granted; we earn it every single day."

North of the border in Canada, Toronto Pearson retained its Best Airport at Departures by Size and Region in the Over 40mppa category for second consecutive year, and the seventh time in eight years.

Deborah Flint, president and CEO of the Greater Toronto Airports Authority, stated: "It is an honour to receive this ASQ award for the second consecutive year.

"This achievement is a direct reflection of the passion and dedication of our employees, who show up every day and every night, demonstrating their commitment to our customers and delivering excellence.

"This recognition further strengthens our commitment to transforming Toronto Pearson into one of the most advanced, sustainable and passenger-friendly airports in the world."

In Europe, Rome Fiumicino continued its winning streak, maintaining its status as the Best Airport at Departures by Size and Region in the Over 40mppa category for the ninth successive year.

Rome Ciampino was also honoured in Europe's Best Airport at Departures in the 2-5mppa category for the third consecutive year.

In addition to Best Airport by Size, Rome Fiumicino was also recognised for Most Dedicated Staff, Easiest Airport Journey, Most Enjoyable Airport and Cleanest Airport in Europe, excelling in customer experience across the entire passenger journey from efficiency and hospitality to cleanliness and overall comfort.

Marco Troncone, CEO of Aeroporti di Roma, enthused: "In recent years, we have consolidated a position of excellence in Europe in terms of service quality, and today we are competitive in a market that has become fully global.

"With traffic demand continuing to grow, confirming European leadership for the ninth consecutive year also means taking on an even greater responsibility: continuing to invest in innovation, processes and infrastructure.

"To ensure high travel standards and support rising demand – which in 2025 already brought us to a record of over 55 million passengers across Fiumicino and Ciampino – a medium-to long-term vision for infrastructure development is essential.

"This is why we consider it fundamental and urgent to continue along the path set out in our Airport Development Plan: a choice that can no longer be postponed if we want to strengthen the country's international connectivity, support tourism and the economy, and further establish Leonardo da Vinci Airport as a strategic platform for global transit flows."

Elsewhere in Europe, for the seventh time, Helsinki Airport was named as the Best Airport at Departures in the 15–25 million category.

"Helsinki Airport is a strategically important international hub for Finland, and this recognition shows that our passengers find our airport to be smooth, comfortable and of a high standard," says Laura Inttilä, senior vice president of Helsinki Airport.

Reacting from a global perspective, TAV Airports reports that four of its gateways collected ASQ Awards – Ankara Esenboğa and İzmir Adnan Menderes in Turkey; Tbilisi (Georgia) and Skopje (North Macedonia).

The 2025 success of Ankara Esenboğa and İzmir Adnan Menderes has led to them being inducted into the ACI World Director General's Roll of Excellence, which recognises airports that have won multiple ASQ awards over a five-year period within the past decade.

TAV Airports CEO, Serkan Kaptan, enthused: "As TAV Airports, we work to deliver the best travel experience across the 15 airports we operate in eight countries by closely monitoring passengers' evolving needs and expectations. Passenger satisfaction lies at the heart of all our operations."

The winning airports will officially receive their prizes at 2025 ASQ Customer Experience Awards Ceremony, which will take place at the *ACI World Airport Experience Summit* in Istanbul, Turkey, from August 31 to September 4, 2026.

SKYTRAX AWARDS

Singapore Changi (SIN) was named Airport of the Year at the 2026 World Airport Awards held at PTE World in London on March 18.

Incheon (ICN); Tokyo Haneda (HND), Hong Kong (HKG) and Tokyo Narita (NRT) completed the top five.

Top ratings were awarded to Fukuoka Airport (5-Star Regional Airport); Haikou Meilan (5-Star Rating); and Shanghai Hongqiao (5-Star Rating).

Other airports faring well in the 2026 Skytrax awards included Quito's Mariscal Sucre International Airport (UIO); Munich (MUC); Bengaluru-Kempegowda (BLR); London Heathrow (LHR) and Helsinki (HEL).

Talking about Quito winning 'Best Regional Airport in South America' for the 11th year running as well as 'Cleanest Airport in South America', Ramón Miró, president and CEO of Quiport, said: "This achievement is the result of the joint effort of the entire airport community.

"Every operation, every service, and every interaction with passengers matters. This recognition encourages us to continue raising our quality standards."

Munich Airport won two awards, 'Best Airport in Central Europe' and 'Best Airport Staff in Europe' at the 2026 World Airport Awards. MUC CEO, Jost Lammers, enthused: "I am very proud of this outstanding award and would like to extend a special thank you to our passengers for their trust and loyalty.

"This recognition once again confirms our commitment to premium service, efficiency, and passenger-friendly infrastructure. We remain committed to consistently investing in measures to enhance the passenger experience.

"I am particularly pleased about the Skytrax recognition for 'Best Airport Staff in Europe", which pays tribute to the exceptional dedication and expertise of our staff. This is the third time we have received this prize since 2023."

Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport (BLR) was recognised as the 'Best Regional Airport in India & South Asia' for the third consecutive year by Skytrax.

Hari Marar, managing director and CEO of Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL), enthused: "Our continued recognition at the Skytrax World Airport Awards reflects the strength of our long-term vision and consistent focus on passenger experience.

"At BLR Airport, our focus is on building for the future, where design, technology and sustainability come together to create a seamless passenger journey."

Heathrow was officially crowned the best airport in the world for shopping and made significant upward progress in Skytrax's rankings for the world's best airports, rising six places to 16th.

Fraser Brown, Heathrow's retail director, noted: "Winning the Skytrax award for World's Best Airport Shopping, and one of the best airports in the world, is a proud moment for everyone at Heathrow.

"Because these awards are voted for directly by passengers, this recognition validates what we see every day – our teams delivering a world-class retail experience in one of the most operationally constrained airport environments in the world."

Helsinki was named Best Airport in Northern Europe for the tenth time while Budapest (BUD), Kansai (KIX) and Santiago (SCL) – part of VINCI Airports' global airport network – won 'Best Airport in Eastern Europe', 'Best Low-Cost Airline Terminal' (Kansai Terminal 2) and 'Best Staff in South America' respectively, the latter for the second year running.

Rémi Maumon de Longevialle, CEO of VINCI Airports, stated: "It is a source of collective pride that eight airports in the network, located in different geographies, have been recognised by ACI and Skytrax in categories as varied as infrastructure quality, staff hospitality, passenger journey, and cleanliness.

"These numerous awards demonstrate once again the commitment of the teams at the airports run by VINCI Airports to innovate in order to offer the best possible experience to travellers."

The Skytrax World Airport Awards recognise airports that deliver outstanding customer experience across key touchpoints, including check-in, arrivals, transfers, retail, security, immigration and departures.

AW

Every second counts

Blending space, service and speed will play a key role in rethinking the passenger journey through airports, writes Sergio Colella, SITA's president for Europe.

Airports must move beyond static infrastructure and redesign passenger journeys around flexible services, intelligent technology, and real-time operational co-ordination.

For decades, airports have been designed around a familiar physical template: long rows of check-in desks, static security lanes, fixed boarding gates, and clustered service counters. But as the desire to travel continues to rise and passenger numbers grow – with global passenger traffic predicted to hit 19.5 billion by 2042 – the vision needs to shift from short-term survival to long-term management.

Airports can often feel like a series of obstacles to overcome. But imagine a future where journeys feel effortless, connected, and designed around travellers' needs, not the needs of static infrastructure.

Achieving that future requires innovative thinking, technology-driven solutions, and new ways of easing physical pressures to improve operational performance and the overall passenger experience.

The solution lies in technology, supported by AI-driven operational intelligence and underpinned by human connection.

REIMAGINING SPACE WITH DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Starting at the beginning, airports typically have large but often underutilised footprints. Forward-thinking airports are beginning to do more with the space they already have by shifting from reactive decision-making to predictive, data-led operations.

When we talk about a 'deskless airport', it is not about creating human-free spaces or removing physical services. Instead, it is about liberating services from fixed locations and empowering staff to deliver them where they are needed most.

AI-supported orchestration allows resources and staff to be deployed dynamically based on real-time demand.

Staff no longer need to be tethered to single points. Instead, they become more visible and accessible, acting as mobile ambassadors who can meet travellers where support is most valuable.

EMPOWERING PASSENGERS

We already have the capabilities and technology to support passengers through multiple self-serve touchpoints, yet in many airports this potential remains underutilised.

Mobile and self-service check-in allows passengers to complete formalities at a time that suits them, reducing queues at traditional check-in desks.

Similarly, self-bag drops can now be deployed not only at multiple points in the airport, but also beyond the terminal in places such as airport hotels or local train stations. This creates greater convenience for passengers while reducing pressure in check-in areas.

Biometric identity verification, bag tagging, and flexible boarding processes all contribute to reducing queues, congestion, and unnecessary stress throughout the journey.

ENABLING SMARTER AIRPORT OPERATIONS

Removing static desks also allows airport teams to move toward more dynamic and value-added roles, such as personal assistance and wayfinding support.

By combining AI-driven resource management with reduced dependence on fixed desks and kiosks, airports can respond more effectively to changing passenger flows.

It is important to remember that smarter technology is not a solution in isolation. The human touch will always remain essential, and automation should enhance personal service rather than replace it.

When technology handles routine and repetitive processes, staff are freed to focus on high-value human interactions, from guiding passengers through complex journeys to supporting accessibility needs. This blended approach allows technology to accelerate movement while people deliver trust, empathy, and support.

Moving staff away from fixed desks and into more mobile, service-focused roles can also contribute to improved job satisfaction and operational resilience.

PREDICTING AND MANAGING DISRUPTION

The opportunities extend even further when AI is used to anticipate disruption.

Advanced models can predict passenger surges linked to flight delays or identify changing arrival patterns driven by multiple operational factors throughout the day. This allows airport teams to adjust resources proactively rather than reactively.

Better and more sophisticated management of passenger flow also frees up valuable space within terminals. This space can be repurposed for retail, lounges, charging areas, and restorative zones, improving both passenger satisfaction and commercial performance.

Our recent acquisition of design specialist CCM Airports has become an integral part of this vision, supporting a future where space and service design are developed alongside digital processing capability.

For more than 35 years, CCM has built a reputation for creating airport interiors that are both beautiful and highly functional, working with architects and engineers to design welcoming, efficient environments that meet the real needs of travellers, airlines, and operators alike.

THE FUTURE AIRPORT

The future of airports will not be defined by a single technology or design trend, but instead by the powerful integration of mobile-enabled services, AI-supported operational intelligence, adaptive design, and more agile ways of working.

Enabled by connected technology and thoughtful design, the deskless airport will become a cornerstone of how airports remain efficient, resilient, and passenger-focused in an era of digital expectations and rising demand.

For passengers, this evolution promises a more seamless experience. Airports will feel like a natural extension of the journey, with fewer friction points and clearer, more intuitive movement through the terminal.

Together, airports, airlines, designers, and technology partners have the opportunity not only to adopt innovation, but to co-create future-ready journeys that truly reflect the expectations, needs and behaviours of modern travellers.

AW

Safeguarding stock

Retail theft has become a real issue for some major international airports and combatting the growing crime requires technology and teamwork, writes Ulbe Keegstra.

As airport retail revenues rebound, retail theft and organised retail crime have escalated into a material financial and operational risk.

Indeed, at some major international hubs annual losses now regularly reach mid-six-figure levels — driven increasingly by co-ordinated, cross-border criminal networks that deliberately move from airport to airport targeting high-value retail.

In effect, what airports are facing is no longer opportunistic shoplifting, but sophisticated criminal groups operating across borders with clear roles, planning and rapid exit strategies.

THE SCALE AND MECHANICS OF THE THREAT

Travel retail has recovered strongly post-pandemic, with passenger volumes and average spend per traveller rising steadily.

However, as revenues have grown, so too have losses. Industry estimates indicate that major international airports can lose between €300,000 and €600,000+ annually in theft-related shrink within duty free and travel retail environments alone.

Typical shrink levels range between 0.8% and 1.8% of turnover, heavily concentrated in high-value categories such as fragrances, cosmetics and premium alcohol.

What has changed is not just the value of losses, but the sophistication of the offenders. Organised retail crime groups now operate across borders, deliberately selecting busy international hubs where passenger density and open-plan layouts create opportunity.

These groups often travel on short-haul flights with minimal luggage, operate within tight timeframes, and depart again within hours — making enforcement complex.

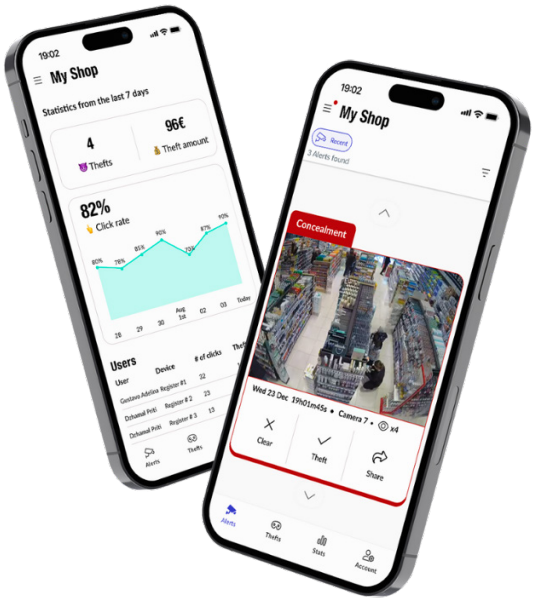
CO-ORDINATED TEAMS AND TACTICS

Organised groups typically operate with clearly defined roles. Some members act as scouts, monitoring staff movements, passenger peaks and store layouts.

Others create distraction, engaging employees or temporarily disrupting store focus. Dedicated collectors target specific high-value products quickly and methodically.

Teams often split up once inside the terminal, entering stores separately to avoid immediate detection.

Communication is subtle, sometimes non-verbal, allowing co-ordination without obvious interaction. Goods may be consolidated and transferred to one individual prior to departure.



The objective is speed, co-ordination and rapid exit — a structured 'fly-in, operate, fly-out' model that reduces detection risk and exploits inconsistencies in security approaches between airports.

WHY AIRPORTS ARE UNIQUELY EXPOSED

Airport environments present unique vulnerabilities: high-value merchandise, intense but temporary passenger waves, and the ability for offenders to leave the country rapidly.

Unlike traditional retail settings, jurisdictional complexity and international mobility significantly limit deterrence once offenders exit the terminal.

This transforms retail theft from a localised issue into a cross-border operational challenge with implications for non-aeronautical revenue, terminal safety and commercial partnerships.

BEYOND SHRINK: OPERATIONAL AND REPUTATIONAL IMPACT

The consequences extend beyond direct financial loss. Airports and retailers face rising costs for security personnel and loss-prevention teams.

Traditional countermeasures — additional guards, locked displays or heavy tagging — can introduce friction into the passenger journey and negatively impact sales in an impulse-driven environment.

Frontline staff increasingly report intimidation and confrontation, particularly when dealing with organised groups. For airport operators, such incidents affect not only commercial performance but also safety perception and terminal reputation.

FROM REACTION TO INTELLIGENT PREVENTION

In response, airports and retailers are shifting from reactive loss prevention to behaviour-based, assistive prevention models.

Rather than relying solely on product protection or post-incident investigation, modern approaches analyse behavioural indicators and gesture-based patterns in real time to support early intervention.

These systems are designed to operate discreetly and do not rely on facial recognition, biometric identification or identity tracking. They simply generate an alert when a situation requires attention, with all decisions remaining human-led.

Effective solutions integrate seamlessly within airport governance structures, comply with global data privacy principles, and deliver measurable financial impact without disrupting the passenger experience.

OPERATIONAL IMPACT AND MEASURABLE RESULTS

Experience from international hubs shows that behaviour-based prevention has a measurable impact.

Travel Retail Security Solutions (TRSS) integrates Veesion's gesture-based theft prevention technology within airport retail environments, enabling early identification of high-risk situations.

Using this approach, TRSS supported a leading European airport in reducing organised retail theft, preventing approximately €350,000 in losses over a 24-month period.

Across multiple deployments, this model has delivered sustained shrink reductions typically ranging between 10% and 30%, translating into annual savings of several hundred thousand euros per major airport.

Equally important, incident escalation and staff confrontation levels decline, strengthening safety perceptions and operational stability.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AIRPORT OPERATORS

Retail theft can no longer be viewed solely as a concessionaire issue. It directly affects non-aeronautical revenue, terminal safety and the overall passenger experience.

As airports continue to develop their commercial strategies and offerings, intelligent retail security should be regarded as a revenue-protection enabler, rather than a standalone cost.

Airports that support data-driven, privacy-conscious and low-friction prevention frameworks will be better positioned to protect margins, strengthen retailer partnerships and safeguard terminal integrity.

CONCLUSION

Organised retail theft in airport environments has evolved into a co-ordinated, cross-border activity executed by structured teams with defined tactics.

Recognising this shift and responding with intelligent, airport-specific prevention strategies designed to protect both revenue and the passenger experience is essential for today's airport operators.

AW

About the author

Ulbe Keegstra is founder of Travel Retail Security Solutions (TRSS), a specialist security consultancy and technology integrator focused exclusively on airport and travel-retail environments. The company supports airport operators and international travel-retailers with AI-driven, privacy-conscious solutions designed to reduce shrink, improve safety and protect passenger experience while delivering measurable financial savings.

Legal **oversight**

Navigating complexity is often key to the successful delivery of major construction projects, writes R&A Legal Solutions' Rabia Choudri.

Across Africa and the Middle East, airports are undergoing one of the most ambitious phases of transformation seen in decades.

Governments are modernising gateways to support economic growth, private investment, and rising passenger demand, often while keeping existing operations live.

In this environment, legal expertise is no longer a background function, it is a core delivery discipline.

Airport infrastructure is uniquely complex. It sits at the intersection of construction, regulated operations, safety and security oversight, international standards, and sovereign interests.

Legal frameworks must accommodate not only how an airport is built, but how it is financed, operated, regulated, and kept functioning during periods of change. Few sectors demand such a tightly integrated legal approach.

Airports are not static assets, they are live, regulated environments with multiple stakeholders. Civil aviation authorities, security agencies, airlines, border control, lenders, contractors, and operators are all involved in airports and each have distinct legal and operational requirements.

Managing those interfaces is central to successful delivery of any project, and arguably this is even more important when it comes to often multi-million or even billion-dollar construction contracts for airports.

One of the key challenges of airport projects is often continuity of operations. Unlike many other infrastructure assets, existing airports must often remain fully operational during redevelopment.

This places heightened importance on legal structures that clearly allocate risk, define interfaces, and align construction obligations with safety, security, and regulatory compliance.

The role of a legal partner like partner like R&A Legal Solutions is to ensure that contracts, procurement frameworks, and governance mechanisms reflect that reality from the outset.

Much of our work is concentrated in African and Middle Eastern jurisdictions where governments are modernising civil aviation legislation, strengthening regulatory institutions, and introducing or refining PPP and concession frameworks.

These reforms are essential to attract private capital, but they also introduce legal uncertainty as new rules are tested in practice.

Predictability varies significantly between markets and can shift quickly with political transitions or institutional change.

Navigating that uncertainty requires more than technical drafting. It requires a deep understanding of how law, policy, and institutions interact on the ground.

We advise clients which include governments, investors, lenders, and operators, on structuring projects to remain bankable over the long-term.

That includes robust change-in-law protections, clear government support obligations, step-in rights, and termination and compensation mechanisms that protect against regulatory or political disruption.

Public procurement is another area where legal capability can determine whether a project progresses or stalls. Procurement laws impose strict procedural requirements, and non-compliance can expose projects to bid challenges, audits, or unenforceable contracts.

Our approach is to design procurement and PPP structures that are both compliant and commercially workable, reducing the risk of later disruption while maintaining investor confidence.

Airport PPPs, in particular, demand careful structuring. Compared with other PPP sectors, aviation projects involve greater regulatory oversight, more complex operational interfaces, passenger and revenue demand risk, and heightened sensitivity around safety and security.

Where PPPs require restructuring, often due to traffic shocks, financing constraints, or policy change, the legal pathway must navigate lender consents, regulatory approvals, and procurement law constraints simultaneously.

Political transition remains one of the most material risks to long-term airport infrastructure commitments.

Changes in leadership can lead to project reviews, renegotiations, or pauses, particularly where foreign investment or concessions are involved. Anticipating that risk is essential.

At the start of any project, it is important to focus on early stakeholder mapping, realistic approval sequencing, and contractual frameworks that provide practical remedies if projects are disrupted by political or regulatory change.

On several airport expansion projects in Africa, we have advised governments to identify and sequence key approvals, such as aviation, environmental, security and procurement approvals, at the very start of the project, rather than dealing with them later or in parallel.

By clearly setting out when each approval was needed and building this into the project programme and contracts, projects were able to avoid construction being stopped part-way through.

This helped keep works on schedule and reduced the risk of delay claims and additional costs.

During periods of political or institutional transition, we have helped governments' structure airport construction contracts with step-in rights, suspension mechanisms and defined compensation regimes.

These tools allowed projects to continue, or be temporarily adjusted, without triggering termination or prolonged disputes, ultimately reducing exposure to contractor claims and protecting public funds while maintaining operational continuity at live airports.

Together, these measures demonstrate how early legal and regulatory planning can materially influence project outcomes, not only by managing risk, but by accelerating delivery, preserving value and ensuring that airport infrastructure remains resilient in the face of political and regulatory change.

Looking ahead, technology will play an increasingly significant role in shaping airport regulation and contracting.

Digital procurement, BIM-enabled construction, smart airport systems, biometrics, data governance, and cybersecurity are already influencing how airports are developed and operated.

Legal frameworks must evolve accordingly, addressing issues such as system interoperability, data ownership, performance standards, and operational resilience, especially where airports must remain live during upgrades.

Across all of this work, our philosophy is simple. Legal advice must be practical, commercially grounded, and informed by how airports actually function.

In rapidly redeveloping markets, success depends as much on managing process and stakeholders as it does on legal theory.

As aviation infrastructure becomes ever more central to national development strategies, the strength of legal capability behind airport projects will continue to be a decisive factor.

Structuring projects that can absorb change, withstand scrutiny, and remain deliverable over time is not optional, it is essential. AW

About the author

British construction and infrastructure lawyer, Rabia Choudri, is the founder and managing partner of Dubai based R&A Legal Solutions, which advises on complex, high-stakes developments across the UAE, the wider GCC, Africa and the Caribbean. She can be contacted at rabia@ralegalsolutions.com

Efficiency driver

Its fleet of autonomous vehicles for operations across the airport site ensure that Hong Kong International Airport is a global leader in the use of the technology.

Hong Kong International Airport (HKG) has become the first airport in the world to fully deploy a fleet of autonomous vehicles in live operations on the apron, arguably setting a new benchmark for the airport industry.

It currently operates more than 70 driverless vehicles, including more than 56 autonomous electric tractors (AETs), eight patrol cars and six staff shuttle buses.

Between them they have run more than three million kilometres, equivalent to circumventing the earth 76 times.

The Hong Kong gateway is also the world's first airport to utilise Level 4 autonomous technology on all its autonomous vehicles, allowing them to operate safely in the complete absence of manual intervention in a designated environment.

This, it notes, is a big step forward from Level 3, where human supervision is required.

And more is to come as HKG operator, Airport Authority Hong Kong (AAHK), is set to break further new ground this year by extending the operation of its autonomous vehicles from airside to landside to carry passengers on public roads.

This remarkable journey is part of AAHK's continuous quest for ever smarter operations and improved efficiency, and the ambition to reinvent the way airports do business.

AUTONOMOUS ELECTRIC TRACTORS

It all started in 2019, when Hong Kong International Airport introduced autonomous tractors for the delivery of baggage.

The tractors are programmed to achieve end-to-end automation. At the baggage hall, the tractors are tasked to tow multiple baggage dollies along three programmed routes of 2.7km to 3.5km each.

Using various smart devices, such as 32-Channel LiDAR, DGPS antenna, bumper sensor and dolly monitor cameras, the tractors operate smoothly alongside other vehicles driven by airport personnel.

In addition to avoiding obstacles and detecting overloads, the tractors are able to switch between fast and slow lanes within tunnels or designated road sections to minimise disruptions during temporary lane closures.

Upon arrival in a safe position at the aircraft's parking stand, the tractors release their towed dollies without manual intervention. They then automatically return to a designated handover area to wait for their next assignments.

These tractors have been further upgraded recently with an Auto-Charging Robotic Arm (ACRA) to enable automated charging.

According to HKG, the "into-stand operation and point-to-point delivery" of the tractors enhance operational efficiency and save hundreds of driving positions.

Next up, the operation of autonomous tractors will be further extended to the air cargo terminals and other locations at Hong Kong International Airport.

Another important group of the autonomous vehicle family at HKG are its Airport Patrol Cars, which perform duties on the perimeters of the airfield under all weather conditions.

These can automatically identify potential intruders within three metres of the security fences and trigger alerts at the integrated airport control centre.

The patrol cars are also able to detect abnormalities on the apron roads, especially irregularities on the razor wire fences, and alert the control centre.

NOVEL BUSINESS MODEL

AAHK's executive director for airport operations, Steven Yiu, said: "When we first introduced autonomous vehicles to our operation in 2019, we didn't only consider technical feasibility, but also the model of working with our business partners to make sure that the new solution would help their business.

"We realised that the crux was about helping business partners to save cost and increase efficiency."

"With each autonomous tractor, on average, we can save four manual driving positions. Therefore 56 autonomous tractors would mean saving the cost of more than 200 drivers.

"In addition, the application of autonomous tractors and patrol cars helps to eliminate the risk of human error and miscommunication, ensure consistent and predictable service, and offer flexibility in adjusting daily operations capacity, thus enhancing safety and efficiency."

Yiu said AAHK invested into the development of the technology behind the autonomous vehicles and built the fleet, all without asking airlines or ground handling agents for funding.

The autonomous vehicles can then be rented for "a reasonable cost", enabling speedy take-up by business partners.

"This is a new model of running the airport business. AAHK as the airport operator built a platform, not for making profit but to enable our business partners to lower cost and gain efficiency. The efficiency gain will, in turn, benefit everyone," added Yiu.

AAHK notes that the introduction of autonomous vehicles is also fundamentally changing the nature of some jobs at the airport.

With fewer drivers behind the wheel, for example, the airport can deploy more technical staff in control centres, while also nurturing talent for professional, managerial and software development roles.

AAHK collaborated with technology company UISEE Technologies from Mainland China to develop its autonomous driving solutions.

AUTONOMOUS BUSES

AAHK notes that its autonomous vehicle journey will go to another level later this year when passengers get to ride on autonomous buses on public roads at HKG.

The autonomous buses will shuttle passengers between the new Terminal 2 and the Hong Kong Port of the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (HZMB), a major link between Hong Kong and the Chinese Mainland and Macao.

Each vehicle will be able to carry 16 passengers and are initially expected to carry up to 500 passengers in each direction per hour before the figure rises to up to 2,000 people in the next phase of the technology's development.

AAHK notes that it is developing the infrastructure to extend the service to connect with the mass transit system in the nearby town centre.

The airport's confidence in its ability to extend the system is based on the fact that it has used autonomous technology to transport staff in restricted landside areas of HKG since 2023.

Indeed, for the last three years a fleet of highly safe and intelligent autonomous buses has been taking staff and employees to more than 20 working positions on the apron.

The six buses run on three designated routes on the apron, with lengths ranging from 2.8km to 5.5km each.

"Just like other members of our family of autonomous vehicles, these autonomous buses are equipped with state-of-the-art technology combining high performance, precision, and intelligence to deliver a smooth and reliable ride for passengers," enthused Yiu.

"We are committed to building a safe, smart, and connected environment for all airport users."

AW

Autonomous times

***Airport World* provides an update on the use of autonomous vehicles at Singapore Changi, Newark Liberty, Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky and East Midlands airports.**

UISEE Technologies has provided Singapore Changi with its first fleet of fully driverless autonomous tractors.

After nearly a year of rigorous trials covering more than 5,000 test trips, two autonomous tractors are now deployed in live airside operations at Changi Airport transferring passenger bags between Terminal 1 and Terminal 4's baggage handling areas.

More than 10 sensors and cameras on each of the tractors work together to enable the vehicles to safely navigate the complex airside environment in all conditions – day, night and in heavy rain.

The autonomous tractors are also monitored in a control centre during operations, where a remote operator can step in immediately, should human intervention be required.

Another six autonomous tractors will be deployed to a different route between Terminal 2's baggage handling area and aircraft stands later this year to support baggage operations under a CAG-SATS collaboration.

And the autonomous tractor fleet will be expanded to 24 vehicles by year 2027.

Going forward, Changi Airport Group (CAG) notes that more autonomous tractors will be deployed to tow cargo and equipment, in addition to baggage.

Changi's autonomous tractor initiative was fully supported and co-funded by the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS), and according to the gateway, marks a significant leap in its push for innovation and operational efficiency, raising manpower productivity while enhancing safety and reliability.

Liu Yanling, CAG's senior vice president of airport operations strategy and transformation, said: "Through collaborating with our airport partners to redesign work processes and infrastructural policies, we are shaping a future-proofed working environment where autonomous vehicles can function safely and seamlessly with other human-driven vehicles, with workers focusing on last mile operations."

UISEE notes that it has operated in the autonomous driving market for over 10 years and, to date, has deployed operator-free autonomous solutions at 21 major airports worldwide as it "empowers global airports toward safer, more efficient and smarter operations".

AUTONOMOUS VEHICLE TRIALS AT NEWARK LIBERTY

The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ) is partnering with autonomous vehicle technology companies Oceaneering, Ohmio and Glydways to test electric self-driving shuttles at Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR) throughout spring 2026.

The agency is evaluating options to provide automated connections between EWR's existing facilities and the new AirTrain Newark system currently under construction.

The new AirTrain Newark is scheduled to open in 2030, and planning is underway for a future Terminal B that will be located adjacent to a future AirTrain station.

Zero-emissions vehicles from each firm will be tested separately in an area of the airport that is not publicly accessible during two-week periods.

The tests are designed to simulate a high-capacity shuttle network with multiple vehicles operating simultaneously in a complex airport environment.

Oceaneering will be tested in March, Ohmio in late March and Glydways in May. The trials are intended to qualify participating firms to respond to a formal Port Authority request for proposals, which may be issued in 2027.

"As we advance the redevelopment of Newark Liberty International Airport, we are looking for opportunities to improve our passengers' time at our airport through unique customer-first experiences as soon as you step onto airport property," said Port Authority chairman, Kevin O'Toole.

"We have been working with self-driving technology successfully for many years, particularly at the airports, and believe autonomous shuttles offer a safe, efficient solution for moving passengers while we concurrently work to build a new AirTrain Newark and the brand-new Terminal B."

The Port Authority's October 2024 request for innovation invited proposals from companies that could provide an electric autonomous transportation network. Firms were asked to respond with how they could service two locations, approximately 2,500 feet apart, for five years.

"Autonomous vehicles are in use around the world and around the country, and they are part of the modern travel experience whether in a private car, a for-hire vehicle or on public transit," noted Port Authority executive director, Kathryn Garcia.

"We are building a new Newark Liberty that meets the demands of the next generation of travel, so we must embrace a future that is inclusive of all the different ways we can move this region."

AURRIGO HOSTS REGULATORY DEMO AT CVG

Aurrigo International plc has helped aviation regulators gain a greater understanding of how autonomous ground support equipment (GSE) can be safely integrated into live airport operations with its latest demo.

Working in partnership with early adopter Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport (CVG), the company hosted high-profile representatives from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

The session enabled regulators to observe an autonomous Auto-DollyTug operating in a live airport setting at CVG, including obstacle detection, defined routing, oversight, and fail-safe procedures.

"Experiencing the technology in operation is essential. It allows authorities to interrogate performance data, validate mitigation strategies, and evaluate how autonomous systems integrate within existing safety management frameworks," explained David Keene MBE, CEO of Aurrigo International plc.

"Engagement of this nature supports the development of clear regulatory pathways and operational guidance, ensuring autonomy is deployed responsibly while enhancing safety, resilience, and efficiency across airport environments."

He concluded: "As automation expands across the airside environment, authorities are taking a proactive approach, seeking detailed insight into safety cases, operational risk assessments, human–machine interaction, cybersecurity safeguards, and the practical realities of mixed-traffic ramp operations."

In another milestone for Aurrigo, the UK based company has been awarded a licence for the provision of ground handling services at East Midlands Airport (EMA) in the UK.

It has obtained the licence specifically to support its partners in the roll-out and implementation of its autonomous aviation technologies.

Lauren Turner, East Midlands Airport's head of airfield operations, said: "As the UK's number one hub for dedicated air cargo, we're always looking at ways to work smarter and ensure the operation is safe, efficient and fit for the future."

AW

Reducing the load

Changing traveller behaviours are reshaping airport operations worldwide and creating new baggage handling challenges and opportunities for the industry, writes Dohop's Marc Pyette.

With traveller habits changing, arguably a new imperative for airports is to improve the way they handle airside baggage transfers on 'virtually interlined flights'.

Virtually interlined itineraries and self-connecting travel are surging in popularity; they account for approximately 5% of total global passengers.

And annual double-digit growth is projected for the foreseeable future. What makes the virtual interline trend particularly notable for airport operators is that it fundamentally alters how they approach baggage-handling infrastructure and passenger-flow management.

SURGING VIRTUAL INTERLINE AND SELF-CONNECT VOLUMES

The numbers tell a compelling story about changing travel patterns. Self-connecting passengers increased from *55 million in 2016 to more than 200 million in 2023*, according to OAG data.

At the same time, virtual interline arrangements have simultaneously gained traction as airlines explore partnership models beyond traditional codeshare and interline agreements. Combined, these booking patterns now account for a large share of connecting traffic at many airports worldwide.

This growth reflects several converging factors. Travellers are prioritising price, as multi-carrier journeys can often provide cost savings.

Airlines and online travel agencies have made multi-ticket itineraries easier to book. And low-cost carriers have expanded their networks to create new connecting opportunities.

What began as niche booking behaviour has become mainstream, particularly on routes where legacy carrier connections are limited or expensive.

For airports, this alters some crucial assumptions about baggage flows, terminal utilisation, and infrastructure capacity.

Airport baggage handling processes are configured for connecting passengers on traditional interline tickets, with baggage transferred between flights. That assumption no longer holds.

CURRENT BAGGAGE TRANSFER CHALLENGES

The operational reality of self-connecting travel creates different pressures across airport systems.

When passengers must claim and recheck bags between flights, those bags are transferred landside, by the passenger, creating recirculation through systems that are already process pinch points. Each bag that exits baggage claim and re-enters through departure screening constitutes a complete cycle through airport infrastructure.

This recirculation increases congestion at baggage claim carousels, check-in counters, and security screening checkpoints.

The unpredictability compounds the problem: whereas scheduled baggage transfer volumes are predictable, self-connecting passengers arrive at variable times, creating erratic demand spikes that strain resources.

Research published in *scientific journals* examining airport baggage systems highlights how sub-optimal baggage flows affect terminal

efficiency, baggage system throughput, peak-time resilience, and airport capacity planning.

Current systems are ill-equipped to handle this passenger flow, leading to issues. Delays of delivering bags can result in passengers rushing to re-check bags and potentially missing their connections.

Misconnection rates increase as bags move through more touchpoints and manual processes. Security concerns emerge when larger volumes flow through security checkpoints operating near capacity.

Queue times at check-in and security are lengthening, disrupting the passenger experience and creating bottlenecks that affect airline operations across the terminal.

The infrastructure challenges can also be longer-term. Airports planning expansions must account for higher baggage system capacity than traditional volume forecasts would suggest, as each self-connecting traveller generates twice the typical number of baggage interactions.

A MORE STRATEGIC APPROACH TO AIRSIDE TRANSFERS

Rather than treating self-connecting travel as an operational challenge to manage reactively, forward-thinking airports and airlines recognise the strategic value of removing baggage-transfer friction for passengers.

The question isn't whether self-connecting and virtual interline travel will continue growing — the data confirms it will — but rather on how aviation stakeholders can support continuity and connectivity across complex journeys.

Strategic partnerships and purpose-built solutions are central to addressing current challenges while positioning airports to capitalise on future opportunities.

Solutions like Dohop's BagConnect, which enable airside baggage transfer between airlines even when no traditional interline agreement exists, are key to seizing those opportunities.

By keeping the transfer of bags airside, these solutions eliminate the need for passengers to claim and recheck baggage while simultaneously reducing the operational burden on airport systems.

The benefits extend throughout the airport ecosystem. Airlines can offer more competitive connecting itineraries without the complexity of traditional interline agreements. Passengers experience reduced connection stress and shorter minimum connection times.

Airport operators see decreased congestion in capacity constrained landside areas and more predictable baggage flows that align with actual passenger type.

THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR AIRPORTS

Beyond solving operational challenges, airside baggage transfer creates revenue and strategic positioning opportunities for airports.

When travellers remain airside during connections, for instance, they have access to a range of retailing options.

Industry research consistently shows that airside passengers spend considerably more than landside passengers, as they have more dwell time and fewer alternatives.

For airports where non-aeronautical revenue is an important source of income, keeping self-connecting passenger's airside directly impacts financial performance.

And the strategic advantages may be even greater for regional and mid-sized airports.

Historically, hub status was held almost exclusively by major airports with extensive legacy-carrier presence.

Enabling efficient airside transfer for virtually interlined and self-connected itineraries allows smaller airports to become genuine connecting points, increasing traffic volumes and revenue-generating capacity without requiring traditional hub airline partnerships.

An airport serving two or three low-cost carriers can facilitate connections among those carriers' networks, creating additional landing fees, passenger facility charges, and concession revenue.

From a capacity management perspective, minimising landside baggage interactions addresses one of the most consequential constraints on airport growth.

Terminal expansions are expensive and time-consuming; optimising flows within existing infrastructure offers a faster, more cost-effective path to handling volume growth.

By keeping virtual interline transfer bags airside, airports reduce the load on baggage arrival halls, check-in facilities, and outbound passenger screening — three areas that frequently become capacity bottlenecks during peak periods.

Predictable, end-to-end baggage flows are becoming fundamental to how airports manage capacity, resilience, and operational stability in an era of complex, connected travel.

Solutions such as BagConnect help both airlines and airports make the most of the opportunities created by virtual interline and self-connect travellers while building infrastructure resilience for continued growth.

Airports that treat baggage transfer as a strategic opportunity rather than an operational cost centre will better serve their passengers, expand more sustainably, and position themselves as valuable hubs in the global aviation ecosystem. AW

About the author

Marc Pyette is product manager for airport experience at Dohop where he is focused on helping airports and airlines simplify baggage transfers and deliver a more seamless connected travel experience.

Tunnel vision

Editor, Joe Bates, takes a closer look at a pioneering new cargo screening solution from Nuctech and the opening of a smart cargo hub at DXB.

Air cargo transports around $8.3 trillion worth of goods across the globe each year, accounting for approximately 33% of world trade by value, according to IATA.

Yet, despite its huge importance in facilitating trade and supporting the health and wellbeing of the world's population – think pharmaceuticals, vaccines and medical equipment – innovation in screening consolidated cargo containers has been in short supply over the years.

Traditionally, cargo has been inspected manually which has created significant challenges in terms of maintaining both security and operational efficiency.

Manual unpacking, for example, is a time-consuming and labour-intensive process that can cause significant delays. While the use of 2D X-ray technology to screen consignments can lead to blind spots because of image overlap.

But all this could be about to change as Nuctech's CTitan cargo solution has taken the security inspection of air cargo containers at airports to another level by effectively removing the need for routine manual inspections.

It is different because it is the world's first CT inspection system designed specifically for air cargo containers, enabling non-intrusive screening of entire ULDs and pallets without unpacking.

Powered by innovative linear CT and dual-energy material recognition, it generates high-resolution 3D images in real time and eliminates blind spots caused by overlap, greatly enhancing the detection of explosives, lithium batteries, and concealed contraband.

In addition to transforming the efficiency of cargo screening at airports, it reduces the need to manually handle shipments, effectively lowering costs, accelerating throughput and theoretically optimising airport workflows.

Screening an entire consolidated cargo container without opening it up is possible because ULDs can fit inside CTitan's 4m x 3m X-ray tunnel, which automatically detects explosives and other dangerous or prohibited content.

And it has already proved that it can screen cargo containers so quickly and efficiently that it has reduced cargo security processing times for a Boeing 747 freighter at Shenzhen Bao'an International Airport (SZX) in China from an average of four hours to an hour and 10 minutes with less people, less space, and less equipment.

To be more precise, it previously took 100 workers, 10 X-ray scanners and "a lot of machine-learning" to security screen a B747F at SZX. Now it takes five people and one third of the space.

In the case of Shenzhen Bao'an, one of the world's biggest cargo hubs, this led to the airport processing between 20 and 25 ULDs an hour.

Talking about the success of CTitan's introduction at SZX and the potential future use of the technology at the Airports Innovate conference in Busan, South Korea, last November, Nuctech's head of overseas solution development, Lin Lin, said: "This fills a critical gap in global aviation security, creating a new category of certified equipment."

Lin – who noted that CTitan could not have been developed without Nuctech's collaboration with the Civil Aviation Administration of China and airport industry support – said: "CTitan is built for the future with cutting edge technology.

"Traditional inspection methods rely on operators to use their eyes to distinguish image overlaps. CTitan allows operators to clearly see everything. This is where technology moves from signal detection into intelligent risk prevention.

"This is not only a simple equipment upgrade, but a fundamental shift in air cargo inspection. It is moving the industry from a scan and reassemble model to a scaling up and consolidation workflow. This solution can optimise workflows, increase cargo handling efficiency, and free up valuable asset-space in the airport."

She concluded: "CTitan is no longer just a concept. It's a proven, certified and operational solution that is actively changing air cargo inspection today.

"It proves that we can enhance security and efficiency simultaneously, and the continued development of AI will enable more intelligent screening that will allow us to stay ahead of emerging threats for export, imports and transport cargoes.

"Looking ahead, the potential is even greater. We envisage a future where this technology is distributed across the entire logistics chain, from warehouses to checkpoints, creating a seamless data driven network."

NEW SMART CARGO SCREENING HUB AT DXB

Meanwhile in Dubai, global air and travel services provider dnata has unveiled a new centralised screening control room at its Dubai International Airport (DXB) cargo facility.

The pioneering new complex has been developed in partnership with Dubai Police and marks a major step in the digital transformation of air cargo operations, combining real-time automation with enhanced security oversight.

What is so special about it? Well, it means that now, from a single high-tech command centre, Dubai Police officers can remotely operate and monitor six X-ray screening machines across dnata's warehouse.

Each device is connected to One Cargo, dnata's digital cargo management system that automates key business and operational functions. This allows for instant data sharing, streamlined workflows, and faster decision-making.

"This project is a milestone in dnata's journey towards smarter, more efficient cargo handling," states Guillaume Crozier, dnata's chief cargo officer.

"Through close collaboration with Dubai Police, we've introduced a model that strengthens security, boosts efficiency, and reflects Dubai's commitment to innovation."

Previously, screening was conducted at multiple warehouse locations, leading to higher resource use and reduced efficiency. The new centralised approach consolidates all processes into one hub, reducing screening time and improving throughput by around 3% annually.

According to dnata, the new system reduces manual touchpoints, enables advanced analytics, and helps optimise resource use, lowering unnecessary cargo movement and fuel consumption inside the facility.

Dnata serves more than 120 airline customers and handles an average of 60,000 tonnes of cargo a month at its DXB facility. AW

Bishoftu International Airport

The new $12.5 billion gateway will transform air travel to Ethiopia and potentially the African continent.

Ethiopian Airlines Group has begun construction of what could eventually be African continent's largest airport in Bishoftu, around 40 kilometres south of the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa.

If all goes to plan, upon completion of Phase One of its development, the new Bishoftu International Airport (BIA) will initially be equipped to handle up to 60 million passengers per annum when it opens in 2030.

However, further development phases will potentially grow this capacity to 110 million passengers annually, with the airport ultimately having four runways and parking for 270 aircraft.

The new airport is needed to ensure that Ethiopia is able to meet future demand with a global transportation hub for the 21st century.

Providing some perspective for the expected rise in demand, IATA forecasts that traffic to East Africa will grow by more than 200% over the next decade.

Ethiopia's location at the crossroads of Africa, Asia and the Middle East and, together with new opportunities that BIA will open up for the country, make Ethiopian Airlines extremely confident in the success of the new gateway.

Speaking at a groundbreaking ceremony for the new airport earlier this year, Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed Ali, said: "Bishoftu International Airport will be the largest aviation infrastructure project in Africa's history, more than four times the capacity of Ethiopia's current main airport, which will reach its limits on existing traffic in the next two to three years."

Designed by Zaha Hadid Architects to meet the airline's future operational needs, BIA is expected to become Africa's global aviation hub, providing facilities of the highest standard with a strong focus on transferring passengers.

With up to 80% of passengers transiting between destinations without leaving the airport, Zaha Hadid notes that BIA will contain "extensive amenities for transiting passengers".

These will include an airside hotel with 350 guestrooms, a wide variety of dining and entertainment facilities, and outdoor gardens and courtyards for relaxation.

According to Zaha Hadid Architects, each of the terminal's piers will incorporate a unique interior materiality and colour palette to reflect the diverse regions of Ethiopia.

Inspired by the Great Rift Valley that passes near Bishoftu as it crosses through the country, a single central spine will connect the terminal's facilities and aircraft piers in a bid to minimise transfer distances and ensure connecting passengers can easily navigate to their next departure gate.

BIA's elevation almost 400m lower than Addis Ababa's existing Bole Airport and longer runways should enhance aircraft performance, enabling Ethiopian Airlines to optimise the maximum take-off weight (MTOW) of their modern fleet of aircraft.

Cristiano Ceccato de Sabata, Zaha Hadid Architects' director of aviation, said: "Bishoftu International Airport is a visionary project for Ethiopia and Africa as a whole.

"Airports bring people together and bridge national divides. ZHA is honoured to be part its development – connecting every region of the continent as Africa's global gateway."

PROJECT DETAILS

Location: Bishoftu, Ethiopia

Important developments: New airport

Scheduled completion: 2030 (Phase One)

Client: Ethiopian Airlines

Principal companies involved: Zaha Hadid Architects (Terminal Planner & Design Architect); Dar Al Handasah (Lead Consultant & Airport Planner)

Other Consultants:
Beijing Urban Construction Group; China Communications Construction Company; Pascal + Watson; Maffeis; BNP Associates; Portland Design; Landrum & Brown; SPADA Ltd, Spectrum

Total investment: $12.5 billion

Situated within the temperate subtropical highland climate of Ethiopia's Oromia region, BIA's passenger terminal has been designed to achieve LEED Gold certification.

The terminal will be naturally ventilated with effective solar shading and will include semi-enclosed spaces and outdoor areas for transferring passengers to enjoy the region's warm summers and mild winters.

Constructed using modular fabrication and assembly to ensure flexibility and cost-effective efficiency, BIA's procurement will incorporate concrete, aggregates and steel that have been produced or recycled locally in Bishoftu.

Stormwater from the airport's runways, taxiways and aprons –as well as the roofs of the passenger terminal and cargo buildings – will be channelled into new wetlands and bioswales for storage and reuse while also enhancing the airport's local biodiversity.

Photovoltaic arrays installed throughout BIA will enable on-site energy production.

Landscaped with native drought-resistant planting including resettled trees, Zaha Hadid notes that the airport's design integrates landside public parks for locals and airside gardens for passengers.

BIA will be connected to the centre of Addis Ababa and the existing Bole Airport via a high-speed rail link, serving as the cornerstone of a new regional transport network.

Located in an area that supports 24-hour operations without the need for a curfew, it is hoped that BIA and its integrated Airport City of mixed-use buildings will create new jobs supporting a local population of 80,000 and enable Ethiopian Airlines to continue its rapid growth and meet future passenger demand.

The hugely ambitious developments are said to support Ethiopian Airlines' 'Vision 2035' strategy which outlines the goal to become a leading global aviation group offering passenger, cargo, and MRO (Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul) services with a focus on technology and efficiency. AW

Airfield intelligence

Embracing AI on the airfield will play a key role in the pursuit of the intelligent airfield and take FOD detection and proactive maintenance to the next level, writes Illuminex AI's CEO, Brian Freed.

At *Illuminex.ai*, we are building the future of airfield intelligence one that prioritises safety, operational continuity, and real-world practicality.

Our flagship FOD[AI] solution, along with the broader platform, embodies five core design principles that, far from being abstract ideals, are deliberate choices shaped by collaboration with airfield operators, from bustling hubs to remote general aviation (GA) fields.

The goal is simple: deliver AI that educates, augments, and empowers rather than complicates or disrupts. These principles guide every decision we make, ensuring technology serves the unique demands of airfield operations.

In an industry where downtime costs thousands per minute and human lives depend on split-second judgment, the right design philosophy makes all the difference. Here's how we approach it and why it matters for every airfield.

HUMAN-CENTRIC DESIGN: AI AS A FORCE MULTIPLIER, NEVER A REPLACEMENT

In the active operations area of any airfield, there is no substitute for human judgment. Technical inspectors, and ground crews bring contextual awareness, experience, and accountability that no algorithm can fully replicate.

We ascribe to the belief that technology bends to the will of its maker, hence our design philosophy centres on augmentation and support and reject the notion that AI should displace humans in core airfield operations.

Our 'detectors' do not issue autonomous commands or seize control of critical decisions; they equip human operators with superior insight. The system highlights potential issues, provides high-resolution context, and lets the trained professional make the final call. This approach preserves safety, maintains accountability, and builds trust.

When AI acts as a reliable co-pilot rather than an autopilot, adoption accelerates, and outcomes improve. Human-centric design is not a limitation; it is the foundation of responsible airfield intelligence.

GEOAI: CONTEXT-AWARE INTELLIGENCE BEYOND SIMPLE COMPUTER VISION

Many AI vision systems analyse pixels in isolation, delivering detections without spatial or temporal understanding.

Airfields, however, demand more. Every square foot is georeferenced, every movement has trajectory implications, and every detection must answer four critical questions: What is it? Where exactly is it? When did it appear? And if it is moving, where is it headed?

Our GeoAI architecture fuses computer vision with precise detection positioning and real-time mapping through the fusion of GPS, Point Cloud, and IMU data into the computer vision data flow.

This is not 'bolt-on' geolocation that tells you the location of a vehicle, it is foundational to our entire platform to support precise temporal and geo-referenced data specific to each logged detection.

As a result, our detections are not vague alerts but pinpointed, geo-tagged insights overlaid directly onto the airfield's operational map.

Inspectors see the object's exact co-ordinates, and size, enabling immediate informed response. This level of intelligence transforms

raw data into actionable knowledge, reducing search time, minimising exposure in the AOA, and preventing small issues from becoming major disruptions.

GeoAI is what elevates detection from 'interesting' to Airfield Intelligence capable of delivering heatmaps, and predictive decision support.

EASE OF USE: SEAMLESS INTEGRATION AND MINIMAL OPERATIONAL DISRUPTION

Airfields run on tightly defined standard operating procedures (SOPs). The cost of change; training, workflow redesign, regulatory approval can far more costly than the technology purchase.

Consider these scenarios. During routine inspection, a system flags potential FOD. The inspector reviews the provided image on an in-vehicle screen, resolves it in seconds, and continues without any unplanned disruption. Operations proceed without a ripple, no alerts to the AOC or ATC.

Contrast this to fully automated approach which can trigger electronic alerts which require human dispatch, resulting in potential runway closures.

These are particularly painful for false detections. AC 150/5220-24 provides allowance for 1–3 x daily false-alarms for automated FOD detection systems, which can lead to significant operational costs from unplanned and unnecessary closures. Our human-in-the-loop validation occurs at the point and time of detection and integrates directly into current SOPs, empowering rather than potentially interrupting operations.

MOBILE SOLUTIONS FOR LOWER COST AND HIGHER RESILIENCE

Installing fixed sensors along runways, taxiways, and aprons complete with power, networking, and frangible bases can easily exceed a million dollars in capital expenses per runway.

Then come the ongoing realities of airfield life: snowploughs, drifts, and routine maintenance that can damage or obscure fixed sensors.

We chose a different path. Our solutions such as FOD^{AI} are fully mobile, mounted on standard airfield inspection vehicles. A single sensor array, leveraging GeoAI and edge processing, covers the entire airfield during normal inspection routes.

No fixed infrastructure. No massive upfront CAPEX. No vulnerability to ploughs or snow accumulation. The system travels with the very teams already responsible for routine inspections, delivering continuous, high-fidelity coverage without adding new airfield assets to maintain or protect.

AIRFIELD INTELLIGENCE FOR EVERY AIRPORT, NOT JUST THE LARGEST HUBS

Too often, cutting-edge aviation technology emerges from the innovation labs of major hubs, organisations with dedicated teams and budgets in the tens of millions yielding solutions with cost and scale that effectively sidelines small airports.

We designed our platform to scale both ways. Small airports receive the same core capabilities, GeoAI, mobile deployment at price points suited to limited budgets and staffing.

Diverse testing sites including Morristown Municipal Airport, Cambridge Bay Airport alongside hubs like Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport and Toronto Pearson International Airport forced resilience, affordability, and simplicity into every layer, ensuring intelligence that truly serves all airports.

The resulting solutions are powerful, but priced and scaled exclusively for those environments. Small and non-hub airports, as well as GA facilities, are left watching from the sidelines.

These five principles human-centric design, GeoAI, ease of use, CAPEX avoidance, and democratisation, form the philosophical and technical foundation of Illuminex Ai's airfield intelligence.

These foundations should be considered, not just for our solutions, but for every airfield technology decision. While the relevance may seem subtle now, the choices made, will prove decisive in delivering ROI positive, resilient, human-empowered operations for years to come. AW

The only way is up!

Building upwards instead of outwards provides a potential solution for airport car parks where space is tight, writes Christopher Tiessen, president/CEO of KLAUS Multiparking America.

Airport leaders everywhere face the same dilemma: passenger numbers keep rising, but airports themselves aren't getting any bigger. And the skies are only getting busier.

Global air travel demand rose by 5.3% this year, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), underscoring that passenger growth is steady and sustained.

That's good news for the industry, but it also means more vehicles, more congestion, and more pressure on ground-side infrastructure already stretched to its limits.

Across the US, the response has been to build outwards. From Chicago O'Hare's *$1.3 billion* Concourse D to Dallas Fort Worth's *$4 billion* Terminal F expansion, more than $8 billion in new projects are underway.

Yet as airports invest billions to expand their footprints, it's worth asking whether we're getting the most out of the land already in play.

MORE LAND ISN'T ALWAYS THE ANSWER

For most airport executives – especially operations chiefs, planners, and facilities managers – the space squeeze is nothing new. When passenger volumes rise, the traditional response has been to build outward: more parking lots, longer access roads, larger terminals.

But every acre devoted to vehicles or circulation is one that can't be used for passengers, gates, or commercial activity.

Talking specifically about car parking, Tweed New Haven Regional Airport in Connecticut is planning to add new surface parking spaces. It's a practical step, but it consumes land that could otherwise serve long-term passenger or terminal needs.

Similarly, at Bradley International Airport, recent funding for terminal upgrades came with the challenge of improving ground access in a confined footprint.

The trade-off is costly in more ways than one. Large surface lots create sprawling traffic zones, lengthen walking distances, and reduce the efficiency of passenger transfers. In cities with limited space or environmental restrictions, those inefficiencies add up quickly.

In short, building outward may buy time, but it limits flexibility and efficiency over the long run.

THE VERTICAL ALTERNATIVE

A growing number of airports are rethinking expansion from the ground up – literally. Instead of spreading out, they're building smarter by moving vertically.

Compact, multi-level parking systems make far more efficient use of land, often cutting the footprint by as much as 40% while maintaining or even increasing capacity.

The reclaimed space can then support higher value uses such as passenger amenities, new gates, or multimodal transit links; investments that yield stronger long-term returns than asphalt ever could.

And the advantages extend beyond space savings. Vertical layouts streamline vehicle flow by centralising entry and exit points, easing congestion and improving wayfinding.

When paired with integrated EV charging, they also advance airports' sustainability commitments while supporting the growing number of electric travellers.

McAllen International Airport in Texas offers a glimpse of this shift in action. As part of its *$176 million* terminal expansion, the airport is rethinking how each parcel of land can deliver more value.

A compact, multi-level parking design helps ensure that future growth supports smoother passenger movement, opens space for continued development, and drives stronger returns on every square foot.

SMARTER SPACE, STRONGER RETURNS

Forward-looking airport authorities are beginning to view land the way developers view downtown real estate: every square foot should generate value.

Where expansion is limited by space, regulation, or community constraints, compact parking infrastructure can unlock higher-yield uses. Even a few reclaimed acres can make room for hotels, logistics facilities, or expanded concessions that deliver stronger, steadier returns than surface parking.

Turning this approach into a workable plan starts with understanding where the land delivers the most value. Begin with a space audit: map how every acre is used, pinpoint congestion zones, and evaluate what each parcel contributes – or costs – in operational and commercial terms.

Next, conduct flow modelling to analyse how people and vehicles move across the campus and how a more compact layout might improve circulation and transfer times. These insights reveal where vertical infrastructure can have the greatest effect.

Follow with financial modelling to compare capital and operating costs over time. Multi-level or modular systems often offset higher upfront costs with faster construction, smaller footprints, and lower maintenance needs.

Finally, align plans with policy goals. Many airports face emissions, zoning, or energy mandates that reinforce the case for EV-ready, space-efficient designs.

Integrating these requirements early helps ensure compliance and adaptability as standards evolve.

Taken together, these steps form a clear framework: assess, model, cost, and align. Airports that take this approach potentially shift from simply adding capacity to creating systems built for long-term efficiency, adaptability, and financial strength.

BUILDING SMARTER, NOT JUST BIGGER

The aviation industry is at a crossroads. Billions are being invested in terminals and runways, yet the spaces that support them are often overlooked or inefficiently used.

As mobility continues to evolve – through rideshare, micro-mobility, and eventually autonomous vehicles – airports must design for a future that's already on the horizon.

Smart, space-efficient infrastructure offers one path forward. But it's not a universal prescription. Each airport's geography, governance, and passenger profile will shape what "smart" looks like in practice.

What's constant is the need to think vertically, plan collaboratively, and design with tomorrow's constraints in mind. AW

Solar flexibility

Whether installed on rooftops, in purpose-built farms or car parks across the airport site, solar can power aviation's future, writes Tom Lloyd.

In 2024, almost one million flights departed from UK airports, producing 34.1 million tonnes of CO_2 – a 6.2% increase in emissions and a 4.1% increase in flight numbers compared to 2023.

Although UK aviation hasn't fully returned to pre-pandemic levels, activity is rapidly climbing. In 2024, flight numbers reached around 91% of 2019 volumes, while passenger levels recovered faster thanks to airlines flying larger aircraft and operating with higher load factors.

As demand continues to rise, so too do carbon emissions and energy consumption.

Like many other industries, airports are feeling the pressure of rising energy prices with the average airport spending 10% – 15% of their entire operating budget on power.

With expansion being an expensive endeavour, saving money where possible will be vital to achieve sustainable growth.

So, how does the industry move forward? With flight demand – and energy prices – surging and reducing carbon emissions becoming less of a want and more of a requirement, the industry finds itself in a complex position.

But perhaps at the heart of this complexity is a simple truth: airports are sitting on the untapped potential of solar energy.

Solar infrastructure and its successful integration with airports can elevate the aviation industry, efficiently and sustainably, helping it to soar to greater heights.

MAKING THE MOST OF SOLAR ENERGY

Most industries have been exploring green technologies through solar photovoltaic (PV) installations on rooftops and as part of larger ground-arrays; allowing facilities to adhere to environmental goals and insulate against volatile power pricing.

However, solar carports have remained in their shadow, despite being just as practical and beneficial as solar PV.

Solar carports are structures that combine the function of a traditional carport – i.e. providing shelter for vehicles – with photovoltaic panels fitted on top to generate electricity.

Research from RenEnergy, revealed that over half a million car parking spaces across the UK could host solar carports, generating an estimated 1.3GW of electricity annually.

This is enough to enough to power the Houses of Parliament for 28 years or meet the energy needs of over 350,000 homes.

Specifically, when looking at aviation, an example of a prime site for carports would be London's Heathrow Airport, with 11 car parks and 51,500 spaces alone.

With Heathrow's high-profile expansion plans gathering pace, and many other airports following suit, balancing growth with sustainability is vital. We believe using available facilities, such as car parks, for the additional purpose of generating green energy will allow airports to offset developments and limit their impact on the environment.

The versality of solar carports should also not be overlooked. With increasing electric vehicle (EV) sales prompting a need for more charging infrastructure, carports can provide customers with EV charging and offer overheard cover on top floor parking levels.

This provides convenient and reliable EV charging for passengers suited to the duration of their parking requirement ensure they have ample charge when they leave.

Furthermore, solar carports can have CCTV camera, LED lighting controlled via Passive Infrared motion detectors and daylight sensors built in to help create a safer, more attractive carpark for holidaymakers, tourists and business travellers alike.

MEETING CURRENT DEMAND

The advantages of solar generation truly lie in its versatility, something the aviation industry should and is able to take advantage of.

For example, the energy generated could be used to power essential maintenance, air traffic control, electric aeroplanes and aircraft technology which, alongside passenger services, can significantly help reduce carbon emissions.

This was recently evidenced in its recent project with aviation provider Saxon Air, where a pioneering solar array was installed to provide charging to electric aircraft as part of the company's wider sustainability strategy.

The installation, 44 solar panels and one inverter, generates 18,146 kWh of renewable energy annually, cutting approximately 3,445 kg of CO_2 emissions each year, and is one aspect of a fully integrated clean energy ecosystem where solar power generation, energy storage and aircraft charging co-exist seamlessly.

Having committed to net zero by 2050, Saxon Air offer carbon offsetting and impact-reducing programmes for charter clients. Beyond 'can-do' sustainability, Saxon Air's focus extends to fostering cultural change and open conversation.

Its new charging port, which integrates a solar energy array specifically tailored for electric aircraft, adds to the site's clean energy capabilities.

In exploring the practicalities of increasing solar infrastructure, we find there are a growing number of incentives for airports.

Options such as power purchase agreements (PPAs) mean that UK airports would pay a significantly reduced rate compared to the national grid and have carports installed free of charge – allowing them to invest in other areas.

Additionally, planning permission is not required when looking to install solar carports, although airports will still have to contact the Distribution Network Operator (DNO) to secure grid capacity and export.

The installation of carports is a mandatory practice in countries such as France and Slovenia in locations where there are more than 80 spaces. This helps these nations generate sustainable power for residents while reducing their overall carbon emissions.

By following in their footsteps, airport car parks can become a necessary example for the UK and help its green transition along much faster.

BRINGING SOLAR ON BOARD

Decarbonising aviation is notoriously difficult, but airports are missing a powerful solution right beneath their feet.

Solar-enabled car parks give airports an immediate route to lower emissions, reduce costs and strengthen energy resilience – all without compromising the passenger experience.

The opportunity is here, and it's practical. Airports must seize it, or risk being left behind as the sector moves on. AW

About the author

Tom Lloyd is the sales director of *RenEnergy UK*

Business exchange

We provide a snapshot of the latest news stories and features from some of the companies that support the growth and development of the world's airports.

DNATA TO EXPAND CARGO OPERATIONS IN ZURICH

When it opens in early 2027, dnata's new cargo centre at Zurich Airport will be capable of handling up to 90,000 tonnes of freight annually.

The extra capacity is likely to be needed within the next few years as the 56,000 tonnes of cargo dnata handled at the Swiss gateway last year was nearly 4% up on 2024.

Construction of the new dnata Cargo Centre is well advanced and forms part of dnata's long-term investment in its Zurich operations.

Once operational, dnata's annual cargo handling capacity in Zurich will increase by 50%, from 60,000 to 90,000 tonnes, marking a significant expansion of its operational capabilities at the airport.

The facility will include 8,330 square metres of warehouse space, of which 7,580 square metres will be dedicated to indoor cargo handling, complemented by 4,600 metres of covered outdoor handling areas.

It will replace the existing Fracht West warehouse, originally built in the 1960s, which has reached the limits of its operational and expansion potential.

The new facility is being developed by Zurich Airport at a cost of €44 million while dnata is investing around €6.6 million to equip the site, including the installation of its modern ULD material handling system.

EASY COME, EASY GO AT SYDNEY AIRPORT

Sydney Airport has partnered with global travel services provider WeKnow to deliver a new premium taxi and Uber booking service at the T1 International terminal.

The new service allows passengers to pre-book and pre-pay for onward travel via taxi and Uber through a single, easy-to-use platform.

Bookings can be made via multilingual digital self-service kiosks located in the international arrivals baggage reclaim area or at one of two staffed WeKnow desks in the Arrivals hall.

In the future it is anticipated that WeKnow will add additional services including limo transfers, shuttle services, public transport tickets and a broader range of travel services including tickets for attractions, city tours, concerts and theatres.

PILOT COFFEE ROASTERS LANDS AT TORONTO BILLY BISHOP

A Pilot Coffee Roasters outlet has opened in the transborder lounge at Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport.

Opened by SSP Canada as part of Nieuport Aviation's ongoing investment in enhancing the traveller experience in the terminal at Billy Bishop Airport, the new addition is aimed at travellers heading south of the border.

"Pilot Coffee Roasters is one of those rare brands that feels unmistakably Toronto – crafted with care, rooted in community, and loved for a reason," notes SSP Canada's vice president for development, Jennifer Juul.

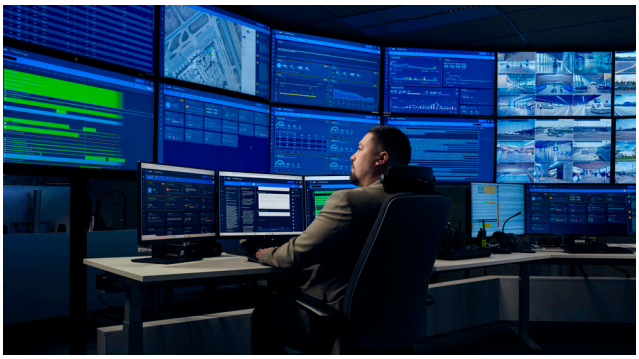
COMBINING OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY, RESILIENCE AND SAFETY

Finnish airport operator, Finavia, and Siili Solutions have developed an Airport Operational Status (AOS) system that they describe as a customisable solution that enables organisations and communities to share real-time situational information with an unlimited number of users.

It notes that to minimise traffic irregularities and increase resilience in the event of disruptions, from 2027 onwards, major airports within the European Union must be able to provide situational information to the Europe-wide network, and this new regulation includes an Airport Operations Plan (AOP).

The AOP is a jointly agreed, continuously updated situational picture and operational plan for an individual airport, enabling all airport stakeholders to make co-ordinated decisions. Finavia's AOS system, it states, can be easily integrated into the new requirements that European airports are now facing.

"We have spent several years developing the AOS together with Siili Solutions and now have hundreds of thousands of hours of operational experience with the system," says Jani Ceder, head of Finavia's Airport Operations Centre.



"We're very pleased. It boosts our cost efficiency and helps us run our daily operations smoother. As European airports move to the next level of shared situational awareness, AOS offers a proven, ready-to-deploy solution to the challenges many airports are facing,"

AOS is a digital system owned by Finavia and developed by Siili Solutions. It is used not only across Finavia's 20 airports, but also in Tallinn Airport in Estonia. Swedavia will be introducing an AOS at Stockholm Arlanda Airport in Sweden in early 2027.

SECURITY ENHANCING CONSOLIDATION CENTRE AT LONDON LUTON

All airside deliveries to London Luton Airport are to be screened at a new consolidation centre at the gateway set up in conjunction with *GXO Logistics, Inc*.

The new initiative will ensure that everything from high-end fashion to perfume and cosmetics, consumer electronics and items for LTN's shops and restaurants are securely checked by GXO before entering the terminal building.

The airport's chief operations officer, Neil Thompson, commented: "The opening of a dedicated, purpose-built consolidation centre provides London Luton Airport with a smarter, more efficient and streamlined logistical approach to managing the hundreds of thousands of goods that are delivered to over 40 shops and restaurants across the airport each year.

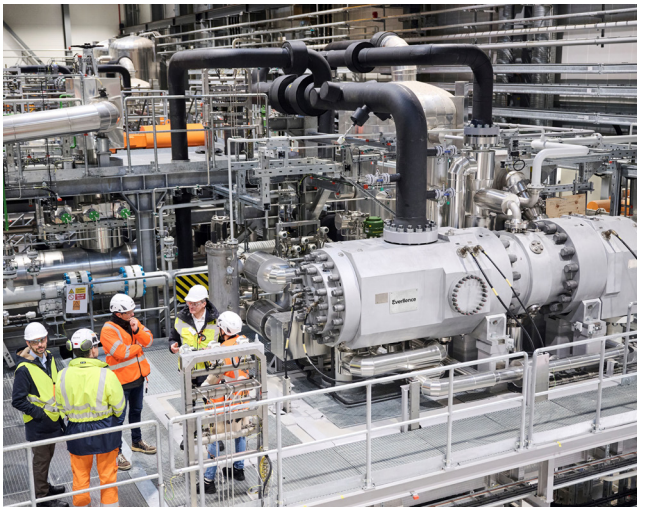
"We're delighted to be working with GXO to develop this facility that will allow us to accept deliveries into one central hub for secure and efficient screening."

The consolidation centre will be located in one of three hangars that are being repurposed as part of an £11.5 million refurbishment programme.

As part of this partnership, GXO will also implement a bespoke IT system, STREAM (Secure, Technical, Real Time, Electronic Alerts and Messaging), to monitor, report and manage service levels.

Martin Cooper, GXO UK and Ireland's managing director for technology and consumer, noted: "As air travel continues to grow, consolidation centres play a pivotal role in driving efficiencies and improving sustainability for airport groups."

Above: Hot water storage tank, Mega Heat Pump hall and woodchip plant in the port of Esbjerg, Denmark. © DIN Forsyning.



Above: A 70 MW Mega Heat Pump provides climate-friendly district heat for Esbjerg in Denmark. © DIN Forsyning/Christer Holte.

MEGA HEAT PUMPS: A GAME-CHANGING TECHNOLOGY

The energy transition is often reduced to electricity generation. Yet much of decarbonisation will ultimately be decided in the heat sector, writes Everllence.

District heating and process heat must move away from fossil fuels, while availability, economic viability and security of supply remain non-negotiable.

This applies not only to cities and industry, but also to energy-intensive infrastructure such as airports, where reliability and operational stability are key.

Everllence develops and supplies Mega Heat Pumps – key technologies for the heat transition. They provide climate-neutral district or process heat with exceptional efficiency, achieving coefficients of performance (COP) between three and five.

In practical terms, this means they generate three to five units of usable heat from one kilowatt hour of electricity – and, depending on the system design, can simultaneously provide valuable cooling.

Another decisive advantage is their scalability: applications range from large complexes such as hospitals and airports to entire urban districts supplied via heating networks.

Another often underestimated benefit is system integration. With the increasing feed-in of weather-dependent renewable energies such as wind and solar energy, fluctuations in the power grid become more pronounced.

Bottlenecks can occur during low generation, while surpluses arise during high supply. Beyond supplying heating and cooling, Mega Heat Pumps can contribute to stability by balancing electricity demand and fluctuating feed-in. Thanks to their dynamic operating behaviour, they can react flexibly to electricity prices and grid signals.

The choice of heat source is important for broad applicability. Depending on location, our Mega Heat Pumps can harness natural heat sources such as water, ambient air, or geothermal energy.

This flexibility allows the technology to be deployed in very different contexts – from urban heating networks to industrial processes.

One example from an energy-intensive production environment is the project with Scout Motors in the USA where Everllence is supplying a Mega Heat Pump system with two 12.5 MW compressors for the new production facility in South Carolina. The system will cover heating demand in winter and provide cooling in summer, using thermal energy extracted from the ambient air.

Esbjerg, Denmark, illustrates how effectively Everllence Mega Heat Pumps are already supporting urban heat supply. At the city's harbour, Everllence commissioned two seawater Heat Pumps in November 2024 with a total heating capacity of 70 MW.

The plant, operated by the municipal utility DIN Forsyning, replaces a decommissioned coal-fired power plant and supplies around 280'000 MWh of district heating annually. This avoids up to 120'000 tons of CO_2 emissions per year while providing heat for around 25'000 households.

The plant is also designed to deliver system services thanks to its high load flexibility. At the heart of the installation are two oil-free, hermetically sealed HOFIM® motor compressor units with high-speed motors and active magnetic bearings.

During testing in Zurich, a single compressor handled a load change of 8 MWel within 30 seconds. This allows the plant to ramp up or down very quickly, helping to balance fluctuations in electricity supply and demand.

CO_2 is used as the refrigerant, an ecologically safe cooling medium that is neither toxic nor flammable and has a very low global warming potential.

Mega Heat Pumps will play a major role in the energy transition. By converting renewable electricity and natural, climate-friendly heat sources into usable heat at large scale, they connect the power and heat sectors.

In this way, Mega Heat Pumps not only decarbonise heat supply but also strengthen the integration and stability of an increasingly renewable energy system.

AW

GREEN LIGHT FOR TELENT TO MAINTAIN HEATHROW'S TRAFFIC SIGNAL NETWORK

Heathrow Airport has selected *Telent* to maintain and support its complex traffic signal network – marking the start of a three-year partnership focused on keeping passengers, staff and services moving safely and efficiently across the airport campus.

The contract will see Telent take responsibility for all preventative and corrective maintenance of traffic lights, pedestrian crossings and monitoring systems that play a vital role in the safe and smooth flow of vehicles and people across the site.

And it notes that by combining 24/7 technical support with proactive trend monitoring and a vendor-agnostic model, it will help Heathrow reduce downtime, enhance safety across its roadside and airside network, and minimise disruption for passengers, staff and transport partners.

"Heathrow is a unique environment; fast-moving, safety-critical, and always on. Securing this contract is a significant milestone for Telent as part of M Group, reflecting the strength of our combined expertise and our shared commitment to operational excellence," commented Reg Cook, Telent's director of asset management.

"Our teams are built for high-stakes environments, and we're proud to bring that capability to one of the world's foremost transport hubs. This partnership is focused on preventing issues before they arise, minimising disruption, and helping Heathrow operate with greater reliability and resilience every single day."

Due to go live in April 2026, initial site assessments have helped prioritise areas for investment, ensuring critical systems remain safe, reliable and fit for purpose in a 24/7 airport environment.

NEW CENTRALISED BHS FOR BORDEAUX AIRPORT

Bordeaux Airport is undertaking a major transformation of its infrastructure as part of its vision for the sustainable airport of tomorrow.

Key to the upgrade is the creation of a new central building, located between Halls A and B, that will enable the implementation of a fully centralised baggage handling system.

The new BHS, notes the French gateway, is being designed to pool resources, optimise operations, and sustainably support future traffic growth and evolving regulatory requirements.

In 2025, the airport welcomed 5.9 million passengers as, between them, its 26 airlines served 92 destinations across 30 countries.

The new centralised system is expected to play a key role in supporting this growth while enhancing operational resilience, flexibility, and efficiency.

Alstef Group has been selected to deliver the core baggage handling solution. The project includes the installation of an XSORT cross-belt sorter, equipped with five injection points, 11 sorting chutes, and three departure carousels.

The scope also includes the integration of a BagSort (SAC) system, the installation of a new arrivals carousel, and the upgrade of 19 check-in counters in Hall A and 26 in Hall B.

In addition, Alstef Group will provide a maintenance contract of at least two years to support operational continuity following commissioning.

A NEW VISION FOR MODULAR SEATING ROOTED IN ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In the union of visionary design and environmental consciousness, the Bay System emerges as a beacon of inspiration in the world of modular seating solutions.

Crafted collaboratively by heritage Italian brand Poltrona Frau and the global architecture studio Foster + Partners Industrial Design, it transcends the ordinary, focusing not just on function but on a sustainable revolution in waiting space aesthetics.

Through its innovative design, Bay System opens up a new, enjoyable way of experiencing waiting areas in public spaces. It is a collection that imagines a world where waiting becomes an art, a moment of anticipation elevated by thoughtful design.

It is a collaborative effort that pioneers new design landscapes for public spaces, standing as a resilient testament to innovation and dynamic solutions in meeting the evolving needs of public spaces worldwide.

The entire system is fully demountable, allowing components to be separated, reconfigured and replaced, extending the relevance and lifespan of the range.

The end-of-life easy dismantling facilitates recyclability of each material. Its unlimited choice of layouts, broad palette of modular elements and materials, and ease of installation will make Bay System a compelling choice for designers, specifiers and transport terminal operators around the world.

The collection envisions two main ranges: Bay Gate and Bay Lounge – each a manifestation of ergonomic brilliance and privacy design. The common structure binds them, twin central beams providing not just support but a canvas for the integration of future technologies.

Power sockets, induction charging for phones, personal screens, and ambient lighting seamlessly blend into this modular masterpiece, offering an experience that goes beyond the ordinary.

Constructed from durable, recyclable materials, it transforms boarding gates into a symphony of form and function, with an ergonomically moulded plastic seat and slender armrest.

Yet, the true brilliance of the Bay System lies not just in its design ingenuity but in its unwavering commitment to sustainability.

Every component is crafted for demountability, urging us to reimagine and reconfigure, extending the lifecycle and relevance of each piece. Its storage efficiency not only saves space but contributes to a reduction in transportation consumption, echoing a harmony with the environment.

The Bay System ultimately envisions a world where waiting spaces become not merely a necessity but an experience – flexible, welcoming and responsive to the evolving needs of contemporary public environments.

With its limitless configurations, modular elements and environmentally conscious approach, it invites designers, specifiers and transport terminal operators worldwide to rethink the way people inhabit transitional spaces.

Building on this vision, on the occasion of Milan Design Week 2025, Poltrona Frau further expanded the system with Bay Accessories, introducing seven new seating elements – two circular poufs, two curved benches and one linear bench – together with two round side tables, one fixed and one height-adjustable.

These additions enrich the collection's modular vocabulary, offering even greater freedom in colour combinations, spatial compositions and functional configurations, while reinforcing the Bay System's role as a dynamic and evolving solution for public, professional and contemporary living spaces.

The full Bay System collection, including the recently introduced Bay Accessories, was showcased together for the first time at the recent Passenger Terminal Expo in London.

AW

MAG'S NEXT GENERATION MANAGEMENT SUITE

Manchester Airports Group (MAG), the UK's largest airport group, has selected Azinq's Airport Hive as its next generation airport management suite to provide the scalability, security, and resilience required to support one of Europe's busiest airport groups.

This is a significant milestone for both organisations. MAG, which serves more than 65 million passengers annually, will deploy Airport Hive suite to unify and modernise its operational data infrastructure.

This creates a real time digital backbone that enables Total Airport Management, Airport Operations Plan (AOP) collaboration, and ensures AI readiness.

With a proven track record of collaboration, Azinq and MAG have been working together delivering measurable results across the group for integration and support services.

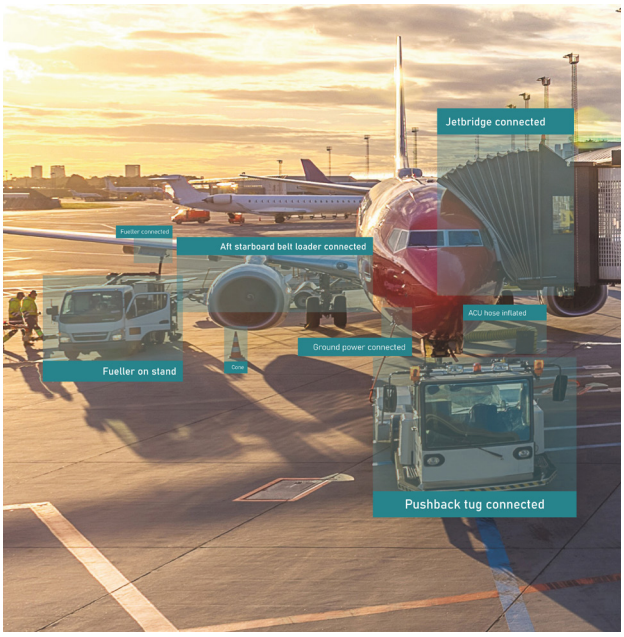
Chris Taylor, CEO of Azinq commented: "MAG has been a valued partner of Azinq since our inception. Our continued partnership together allows the opportunity for Azinq and MAG to set a new benchmark for operational performance and digital innovation within UK aviation.

"This contract represents the natural evolution of a relationship built on trust, innovation, and shared ambition."

The comprehensive transformation will replace legacy operational systems with Airport Hive suite including flight data management, boarding management, A-CDM capabilities, aeronautical billing, reporting and seamless integration across all critical airport operations.

MAG's product and services director, James Hill, noted: "The selection of Airport Hive will be an important step forward in our technology strategy, installing a platform at the heart of our intelligent airport ecosystem. This will support more integrated, data-driven operations and enable continuous improvements across the passenger journey.

"Through our continued partnership, we are strengthening the digital backbone of our airports, enabling us to continue to deliver efficient and enjoyable airport experiences for millions of passengers each year."



ASSAIA UNVEILS GATE OPTIMISATION SOLUTION

Assaia has announced the launch of StandManager, a Resource Management System (RMS) that leverages the latest AI technology to help airports determine where aircraft should park and for how long.

CEO, Christiaan Hen, said: "Airports historically allocated stands and gates using fixed buffer times, scheduled flight data, and manual processes. StandManager replaces this approach with a solution that continuously analyses live operational information to automate the stand and gate allocation process and calculate predictive buffers for each flight.

"For example, if the model identifies that a flight is likely to arrive 10 minutes early or late, the stand plan automatically reallocates gates to optimise within the airports rule set. By adjusting buffers dynamically rather than relying on fixed assumptions, airports can make better use of available capacity."

ADB SAFEGATE TO FOCUS ON AIRSIDE OPERATIONS

ADB SAFEGATE has announced the divestment of its Terminal business line, reinforcing its strategic commitment to airside operations and accelerating its investment in next-generation airfield technologies.

As a result, the company says that it is advancing its roadmap across new-generation airfield lighting systems, intelligent power solutions, and digital platforms for Airfield, Apron and Tower applications.

It will also expand its research and development investments, including the continued growth of its ADB SAFEGATE LABS initiative. The programme accelerates co-creation with airport partners, enabling emerging technologies to be tested, validated, and scaled in live operational settings.

AW

PEOPLE matters

Moments of truth

Richard Plenty and Terri Morrissey reflect on how passenger perceptions of travel are shaped by their experiences in turbulent times.

How fast and how unexpectedly the world changes. We ran our ACI 'High Performance Airport Leadership' programme from February 16-20 and the message coming from our international participants was optimistic, with growth remaining the principal challenge.

We will be running a second course from March 23 -27. In the space of one month, war has broken out across the Middle East at a scale and intensity few had anticipated. The context has changed entirely. What will be the mood this time?

We live in turbulent times. For over 20 years, leadership commentators have been using the phrase 'VUCA' to describe a world which is 'Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous'. This remains a useful acronym, but the increasingly chaotic nature of change means it doesn't adequately capture people's perceptions and emotional responses to the way things are going.

The impact on people can be profound. Jamais Cascio, an American anthropologist and principal author of the recently published book *Navigating the Age of Chaos* (2025) has come up with the acronym: 'BANI: Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear, Incomprehensible' in an effort to capture how people perceive a world in which expected patterns fail, and where the illusions people have built up on how we can predict and control the future are called into question.

In this world there are no constants. What are the anchors that can steady the ship?

In chaotic times, we increasingly rely on the constancy and stability of human interactions and experience. These become critical beacons in an uncertain world. Supporting each other – our family, friends, colleagues and sometimes even strangers – becomes very important.

We remember the positive things that people do for us that make a difference in this unpredictable world. We yearn for communication that helps us understand what is happening.

This also holds true for the passenger experience. Reputations can be made and lost when times are challenging. This is when people's impressions are most vivid – and these are reflected in the stories that are told for many years afterwards. Treat people well when times are tough and they will tell others about it. Treat them badly, and they do not forget.

As a passenger, there is nothing more unsettling during disruption than to be left without any information, human contact or sources of reliable messaging. We both have experiences that we have never forgotten. They include being stuck in Sydney Airport for hours on the runway with a young family during a strike over 30 years ago and not being given accurate information by the airline about the evolving situation.

Fortunately, there are signs that many airports are taking their responsibility for the passenger experience much more seriously than before.

In an interview on CNN, the CEO of Dubal Airports, Paul Griffiths, was asked how DXB was supporting passengers during the current crisis. He replied that it was 'incredibly important to keep people informed' and that the airport had also remained 'calm and composed'. He also said that he thought the airport was doing 'reasonably well'.

As testimony to this, members of one of the author's family recently passed through Dubai Airport en route to Sydney Australia from London. Providing a quick test of these aspirations, their comments were that everything seemed completely normal and that DXB was busy but efficient.

Indeed, the most stressful part of their journey was the loss of our 6-year old's cuddly toy 'Hedgie', left on the inbound flight.

'Walking in the passenger's shoes' and making an anxiety provoking situation feel as safe and normal as possible is a good place to start when addressing the passenger experience in turbulent times. Finding and returning Hedgie would be the icing on the cake! AW

About the authors

Terri Morrissey and Dr Richard Plenty run ACI's Human Resources training. They received a Presidential Citation from the American Psychological Association in June 2022 for their leadership in advancing global psychology. Contact them at info@thisis.eu

SmartHub Power Bar

Designed to offer a focused zone for travellers working on the move. Its refined design language allows for perfect harmonization with all of the Zoeftig seating ranges, with our trusted styling ethos, complimentary materials, and delivering the Zoeftig pedigree for quality that airports have known and trusted for over 65 years.

Available in a choice of heights, widths, depths, and single-side or double sided, there's a SmartHub for every airport space. SmartHub comes in bar height, desk height, has full ADA/DDA compliancy dimensions, as well as being offered as a standalone bench, ensuring that every passenger demographic and project scope is covered.

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