

Airport construction projects 'on-target' for rest of 2009

By Scott E. Pacheco

Work on two Miami International Airport terminals is "on target" this year with no major delays on the horizon.

The \$1 billion-plus South Terminal is set to wrap up in May, while the 48-gate, \$2.8 billion North Terminal expansion may push ahead of schedule in some areas as it works toward a 2011 completion date, says Max Fajardo, deputy aviation director with the Miami-Dade Aviation Department.

"We are mitigating all delays with the contractors. Right now there are no delays on North Terminal," he said. "There's obviously day-to-day issues that come up, but right now there are no physical delays on the schedule."

Five gates are to open this year in the North Terminal. Additionally, there is a July 28 deadline to finish the new ticketing areas, and the new conveyor system needs to be up



Miami International Airport is using name-brand recognition to boost business in the South Terminal.

Photo courtesy of Miami-Dade Aviation

and running so that the old baggage shed and concourse C can be demolished, Mr. Fajardo said.

Also, the timeline for a concourse train system that would shuttle passengers on the fourth

floor of the airport has been pushed up.

"We are looking at limited service [at two stations] between concourses D and C," he said. "We're going to try to get

that up and running prematurely — it wasn't supposed to be until mid-2010. The issue here always is when you accelerate something it costs you money." The train is set to be full

service at all four stations by the end of 2010.

While things are on-target this year, the North Terminal has dealt with its share of cost overruns in the past, with Miami-Dade commissioners approving a nearly \$800 million addition to the cost of the North Terminal in March 2007.

In the equation for the South Terminal are ongoing negotiations for contractor claims for delay and disruption, Mr. Fajardo said.

"We're in the process of closing out the South Terminal project," he said. "We're still in the negotiation phase with some claims on South Terminal. The county has not been sued yet and we continue to speak to anyone who wants to speak with us... we continue to talk, we continue to negotiate."

Things like the train, which is being pushed ahead of schedule from a "customer service perspective," will only help improve the atmosphere for passengers, Mr. Fajardo said.

Also, the Miami Intermodal Center next to the airport that is to connect passengers with Tri-Rail, Amtrak, buses, car-rental facilities and a planned extension of the Metrorail system linking the center to Earlington Heights "is due to be up and running in 2010" and "is full speed ahead right now," he said.

Another thing that will help improve the passenger flow for businesses, especially in the South Terminal, is finishing the construction to bring passengers away from construction areas and into businesses, said Cynthia Cohen, president of Strategic Mindshare, a retail strategy consulting firm.

"You're spending a lot of time walking in airport hallways now during this construction when that time six months ago was spent at the other side of security browsing stores," Ms. Cohen said.

Mr. Fajardo acknowledged there's work to be done.

"All the gates in the South Terminal are packed and our ticket counters are packed," he said. "We're going to make some adjustments to get more traffic" to businesses.

The South Terminal has seen about 30 shops and restaurants open in the past year, with several more open soon. To boost business, the airport has brought in more brand-name stores and opened another security checkpoint that funnels traffic to the commercial area.

José "Pepe" Diaz, Miami-Dade commissioner and chairman of the county's Airport and Tourism Committee, said late last year that the key to success is "tweaking the system" to capitalize on a good product.

Ms. Cohen said the sooner the work is done, the sooner things can normalize.

"When you're under construction, you have no choice, you just don't," she said. "So the airport has some self-inflicted wounds, if you will, that the only thing that's going to cure them is time. They have to finish construction."