

Airport adds amenities

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Passengers walk from the parking lot toward the Laughlin-Bullhead City International Airport's main passenger terminal on Tuesday morning. The goal is to attract 70 more passengers a day.

BULLHEAD CITY — The Laughlin-Bullhead International Airport has added amenities to make the airport more attractive to potential fliers. Airport officials noted they have been doing things to draw in a big-name airline — and, in turn, more customers — for at least a decade, said Jeremy Keating, airport director.

Some examples of these changes include allowing passengers to park for free, which wasn't always the case. There's a sign reminding people they need to remove their vehicle within a certain number of days, however.

People once stood outside to wait for their luggage to come through a chute. A large carousel now runs in an air-conditioned indoor area. Some newer security equipment can move passengers through that process more quickly. A runway extension completed in March was to deal with heat-related issues that affected some flights. The airport also supports general aviation, cargo transport and military activities, as well as other travel and tourism flights, including charters that carry people to and from casinos in Laughlin.

The economic impact of the LBIA exceeds \$100 million annually through creation of jobs and the spending of money by people who use the airport, according to the capital development projects plan written before these projects were completed. It's estimated that American Airlines will boost the number of enplanements by about 15 percent this year. There were roughly 110,000 enplanements in 2016, Keating said.

The goal is to add 70 people a day to that total. It's only a percentage of the people flying into Las Vegas who come to the general area.

The two-year contract with American Airlines started this past February. The airport has spent about \$200,000 to let people know there is passenger service daily to and from Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport. There's also a great deal of advertising supporting American Airlines around the airport so all passengers coming through can see that there's an alternative to take them to and from the region for future visits. And to make the deal sweeter for American Airlines, many of the fees the local airport could have required it to pay have been waived.

"That's because we want American to be here for a long time," Keating said. "Many people might find it less expensive as well as more convenient to make that flight instead of driving for hours, then going through the large airport to board another plane."

Among additions to the local airport since American started local service: Big-screen televisions, more food and beverage offerings, an ATM, massage chairs and a charging station for personal electronics. American Airlines has its own check-in kiosks to help speed that process and there's also a taxi program for these fliers. "Our airport also has a 90 percent on-time rating," he said. "The industry average is about 75 percent."

Keating talked about meeting a woman recently who traveled to Bullhead City from Orlando, Fla. She rented a car to complete her journey after a flight into one of larger airports instead of taking a connecting flight into Laughlin-Bullhead. She admitted to not comparing costs online before planning her trip. Keating went online and was able to set up a travel plan that would have saved the woman \$200.

"At least check those prices before making travel arrangements," he said. "If someone is checking that's more than half the battle. A lot of people will see it's better to fly out of Bullhead City."