



White Paper

# Enhancing the Passenger Experience

## Insights from ICF

*By Eliot Lees*

What does enhancing the passenger experience truly mean? What actions can airport managers take to improve the passenger experience?

Airports, airlines, third-party providers, architectural and engineering firms, are not on the same page with what this concept really means. Conferences are being organized around how to create and implement this strategy. Is it design? Is it branding? Is it customer service? Is it passenger engagement? Is it technology?

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Enhancing the passenger experience is about all of the above—and more.

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Today's industry literature indicates that the passenger experience is focused on new and innovative commercial offerings, airport branding, the creation of a sense of place, and digital engagement through new technology. These elements are important to upgrading the passenger experience. However, too often airports focus on retail, passenger marketing, and communication but do not deliver on the efficient, uncongested, and informed passenger path from the curb to the gate. And as airports well know, the challenge gets harder each year as passenger volumes continue to grow. Consequently, passengers often are too frustrated and hurried to take advantage of all of the innovative offerings and services that an airport has worked hard to develop.



## Key elements to enhancing the passenger experience

- Physical Layout
- Wayfinding and Signage
- Technology Stakeholder Engagement
- Employee Organization and Responsibility.

An integrated, multidisciplinary business strategy is needed. Commercial, IT, planning, and operations must work together with a common focus and a common purpose: to remove the frustration, uncertainty, and confusion from the passenger journey and provide the offerings and services that passengers want. This strategic change in culture and in approach will truly enhance the passenger experience.

## Elements in this integrated, multidisciplinary business strategy:



**Physical Layout**—Building more terminal infrastructure can improve the passenger experience, but it is expensive and it takes a long time to realize. Instead, airport management can make the most out of current facilities. By carefully analyzing the passenger journey and rethinking how the passenger interacts with each element of the terminal experience (through wayfinding, airport employees, technology, and stakeholder management), airport management can optimize the performance of existing infrastructure and improve the passenger experience.



**Wayfinding and Signage**—Effective signage can lessen confusion and uncertainty by guiding the passenger from the curb through check-in, security, and the path to and from the gate in a clear, logical, and helpful manner. Digital signage, interactive wayfinding, and electronic communication all help to enhance the flow and movement of passengers through a terminal.



**Technology**—Emerging sensor technology that captures, measures, and facilitates the analysis of passenger flow and queuing is being applied at airports to better understand how and when bottlenecks occur. Airport management can capture data that allow the rethinking and refining of physical layout and signage as well as how to engage and coordinate with other airport stakeholders—all with the objective of enhancing the passenger experience.



**Stakeholder Engagement**—Changing the dialog with stakeholders is critical. As part of an integrated approach to enhancing the passenger experience, airport employees must move from a role of airport oversight to one of stakeholder engagement. Airport management has control over only a portion of the passenger experience. Too often the airport is blamed for poor passenger experiences that are not within its control. Airport management must become adept at analyzing, evaluating, and coordinating with the other stakeholders as part of the overall delivery service to the passenger. Airport management needs to engage airlines, the Transportation Security Administration, the Customs and Borders Patrol, and third-party providers in a new and more collaborative way. Management must use sensor technology to show these stakeholders what is actually going on and how their actions impact overall terminal performance and the passenger experience.



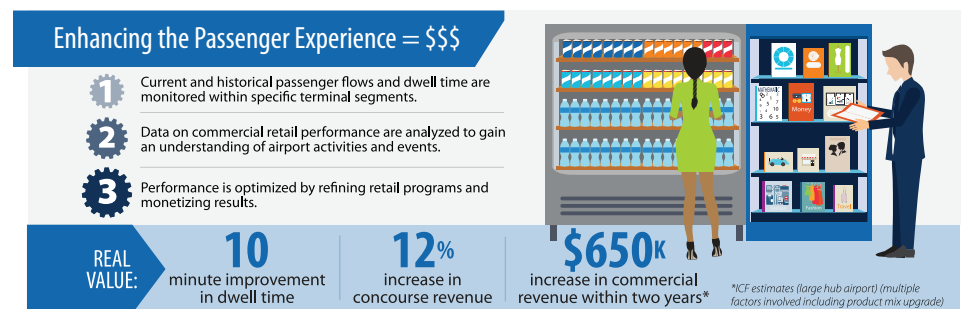
**Employee Organization and Responsibility**—Employee effectiveness is essential. As part of this new approach to enhancing the passenger experience, airport employees must move from a role of airport oversight to one of stakeholder engagement. Airport management objectives must be



refocused to the passenger experience. Data and analysis offered by new technology offer insights for implementation. Airlines and other stakeholders can be engaged and assist with integrated solutions. The airport organizational structure, communication, and even tenant contracts may need to be modified to accomplish these changes. Without a strategic new management philosophy and supporting resources and tools, this promising innovative approach will only go a small way to "enhancing the passenger experience."

## Conclusion

**A better passenger experience translates into money**—If an airport can execute this new strategy effectively, the enhanced passenger experience will translate into measurable financial benefit. This paradigm shift produces a return on investment. An efficient, uncongested, and informed path for passengers from the curb to the gate means more dwell time within the terminal, more opportunities for passengers to enjoy what the airport offers, and more time for passengers to spend money on concessions. More efficient use of the airport terminal also means better, more balanced passenger flow; better and more productive space utilization; and ultimately, less investment in capital expenditure.



Airport managers can "enhance the passenger experience" and realize the value of this innovative initiative by:

- Refocusing airport management, commercial, IT, engineering, and operations objectives to the passenger experience;
- Analyzing big data that new technology provides; and
- Engaging in new ways with airlines and other stakeholders.

**About ICF**

## About ICF

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**About the Author**

**Eliot Lees** leads ICF's airport operational consulting practice, which combines process flow analysis, facility layout, organizational strategies, and new technology to improve airport performance and enhance the passenger experience. He has worked extensively with airports and third-party operators in business strategy and strategic planning, transaction due diligence, and infrastructure-related development, both in the US and internationally.







Prior to joining ICF, Mr. Lees was an investment banker specializing in municipal and tax-exempt financing. He spent more than 10 years in various finance positions with leading New England financial institutions, including as vice president at the Bank of New England in Boston, Massachusetts.

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