

Roosevelt Council, Jr., Airport General Manager
Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport
Congressional Hearing

Checkpoint of the Future: Evaluating TSA's Innovation Task Force Initiative | April 27, 2017
U.S. House Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee
on Transportation and Protective Security

Chairman Katko, Ranking Member Watson-Coleman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing. And let me express my sincerest gratitude for once again including Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport in your discussions.

As you are well aware, Hartsfield-Jackson is the world's busiest airport. In 2015, we became the first airport ever to host more than 100 million passengers in a single year. And in 2016, we welcomed even more, topping 104 million passengers. To provide some perspective, that's more than 280,000 passengers, on average, navigating through the Airport each and every day.

In 2016, more than 17 million passengers underwent TSA security screening at our Airport. That's nearly 47,000 daily passengers, on average, going through security screening each day.

Stories of long security lines made national headlines in 2015 and 2016. At Hartsfield-Jackson, wait times exceeding 35 minutes were not uncommon during this time period. To ease congestion while keeping safety and security at the forefront, we worked with TSA and the airlines to ramp up staffing, open lanes earlier in the day and increase the use of K9 teams.

In addition, we introduced Automated Screening Lanes, commonly known as Smart Lanes, which is the subject of today's hearing.

Hartsfield-Jackson was the first airport in the nation to test these Smart Lanes as part of a pilot program in which we partnered with Delta Air Lines, the Transportation Security Administration and the City of Atlanta. These Smart Lanes are modeled after a system used at London Heathrow Airport.

Construction on two Smart Lanes began May 4, 2016, at our South Security checkpoint in our Domestic Terminal. Both were fully operational by May 26.

For Hartsfield-Jackson, Smart Lanes supported three primary objectives:

The first objective: to strengthen security. Smart Lanes have a dual exit belt from the X-ray machine. If a bag sets off an alarm, it is diverted to an alternate belt for inspection. The owner of the bag does not have access to the diverted bag.

The second objective: to increase operational efficiencies. Smart Lanes reduce passenger wait times. Plus, the technology, particularly the automatic bin return, eases the manual work performed by TSA agents, who traditionally shuffle bins to the front of the line throughout the day. In addition, these lanes allow up to five passengers to divest for screening at the same time, which is more efficient than single-file queues at most screening checkpoints.

The third objective: to improve the passenger experience. The Smart Lanes' five individual stations enable passengers to place items in the bins at their own pace. In effect, this setup keeps slower passengers from holding up the line. Plus, the bins use a tracking mechanism so passengers do not have to wait to go through the body scanner at the same time as their bags. After passengers pick up their bags, the bins automatically return to the start of the line.

As I said, we opened our first two Smart Lanes in the spring of 2016. From our initial observations, those lanes proved successful, safely and efficiently speeding passenger throughput

by as much as 30 percent. This is an important statistic when you're talking about reducing wait times and eliminating bottlenecks.

A standard security lane can screen, on average, 160 passengers per hour. A Smart Lane can screen, on average, 208 passengers per hour. During busy travel periods – like the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving – such expedited screening can make the difference between a 35-minute wait and an under 20-minute wait, which is Hartsfield-Jackson's overall goal for security screening.

Based on the success of our two pilot Smart Lanes, we decided to move forward with purchasing additional Smart Lanes to install in our Domestic Terminal.

It is important to mention that in our Domestic Terminal, we have three security checkpoints: Domestic South with four lanes; Domestic North with five lanes; and Domestic Main with 18 lanes. That's 27 security lanes total.

Beyond the two existing Smart Lanes, our goal was to add 20 more, converting the majority of the standard lanes. That would bring us to 22 Smart Lanes out of 27 security lanes total. The North checkpoint would have four Smart Lanes, South would have three, and Main would have 15.

Our initial two Smart Lanes were funded by a \$1 million investment from Delta Air Lines. Hartsfield-Jackson purchased the additional 20 lanes with Airport dollars. That expenditure totaled about \$12.5 million. I should point out that, for the most part, U.S. airports are not funding these Smart Lanes themselves, but relying on airlines to foot the bill. However, given the vast amount of Origin and Destination traffic at Hartsfield-Jackson – combined with the efficiency from the pilot Smart Lanes program – we saw advantages early on and, of course, we were encouraged by Delta's initial investment.

Over the past year, we have phased in the installation of 20 Smart Lanes to minimize operational disruption to our passengers and maintain overall screening capacity.

We contracted with equipment provider MacDonald-Humphrey, and we worked with the company to make adjustments to our checkpoints to accommodate the Smart Lanes. Standard lanes are roughly 52 feet long. Smart lanes require an additional 25 feet of space, so there is a sizable footprint to this equipment.

We began the electrical work in October of 2016. Then in November, we installed one lane at Domestic South. And in December, we installed two lanes at Domestic North. Starting in January of this year, we staggered the installation of 15 Smart Lanes at Domestic Main and two additional lanes at Domestic North. We set a deadline of May of this year to complete installation of the 20 Smart Lanes, and I was told last week that we are ahead of schedule for the busy Memorial Day weekend travel.

Of course, we were mindful of how the installation would impact our customers. So each phase took into consideration several things: First, that our PreCheck lanes would “flex” to ensure that, at a minimum, four lanes remained open throughout the construction timeline. Second, we made sure all lanes not under construction could be staffed if needed.

So now that 19 of 22 Smart Lanes have been installed and are in use, I want to offer a few observations:

First, it's clear that Smart Lanes speed passenger processing. We've seen that in action. But I should mention two important caveats: First, these Smart Lanes have been with us just shy of one year, so their performance over time will be the true measure of success. But based on our initial findings, we are pleased with the results. The second caveat is this: A learning curve exists for passengers who are unfamiliar with the technology. However, we are confident that, in time, people will understand the process and enjoy the convenience and time savings.

Second, it's clear that automation benefits both TSA and the Airport: The automated bin system has relieved TSA agents of manual work involving the bins. But the Smart Lanes themselves have also provided security enhancements. If a suspicious bag is detected, it is kept secured from passengers without holding up the line.

Third, it's clear that Smart Lanes may help propel our long-term growth: As I mentioned earlier, this Airport welcomed 104 million passengers in 2016. That's a 2.6 percent increase over our 2015 numbers. And we expect our passenger counts to continue climbing this year and beyond. So these Smart Lanes – combined with the renovation, modernization and expansion of our facilities as part of our 20-year capital improvement program – will prove useful as we grow our operations to meet passenger demand well into the future.

I should also mention that while Hartsfield-Jackson has been the pioneer on testing these Smart Lanes, other airports have jumped on board. These airports include LAX, Chicago's O'Hare, Newark and Dallas-Fort Worth.

Hartsfield-Jackson's pioneering efforts are due, in no small part, to strong working relationships we have cultivated with our stakeholders, particularly TSA. I want to express our team's gratitude to TSA Federal Security Director Mary Leftridge Byrd for the remarkable job she and her team do each day to ensure passenger safety and security while trying to achieve exemplary customer service. The world's busiest airport appreciates its cohesive and respectful relationship with TSA to achieve successful operations on a daily basis.

In closing, while it's too early to fully assess the strengths and weaknesses of Smart Lanes, our findings over the past year have shown positive results when it comes to enhancing safety, accelerating passenger processing, increasing operational efficiencies and improving the customer experience.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to address this body.