

2003-2004 SANTA CLARA COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY

**INQUIRY INTO GROUND TRANSPORTATION SERVICES
AND SIGNAGE AT THE SAN JOSE AIRPORT**

Summary

The Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury (Grand Jury) inquired into several issues at the Norman Y. Mineta San Jose International Airport (Airport), including wait times for rental car shuttles, taxis, and security lines, plus the adequacy of signs in the terminal areas. The Grand Jury found that the Airport has taken corrective action to reduce excessive wait times for rental car shuttles. A current citywide taxi study may prompt changes in taxi service. The length of security lines has been reduced since the Federal Transportation Security Agency (TSA) hired additional screeners and finished their training. The Airport has begun to address the need for better signs in the terminals by hiring a signage consultant.

Background and Discussion

Passenger services that meet travelers' expectations are important in contributing to the flying public's choice in using the Airport and consequently affect the financial success of this \$72 million dollar enterprise. The Airport is in competition with the San Francisco and Oakland airports to attract passengers, airlines, routes, and cargo to generate income. As well as providing excellent service directly to airlines, the Airport can contribute to the airlines success by making passenger services convenient and pleasant. Among others, these services include rental car shuttles, taxi services, security screening lines, and directional signage.

Rental Car Shuttles

The Grand Jury reviewed the shuttle bus service provided by the rental car companies, funded by a \$5 charge paid by each rental car customer. Rental car agencies work together with Airport management to arrange the shuttle bus schedule, approved by a majority of the nine rental car companies. Shuttleport California, LLC. currently has the contract to supply and operate the buses for both Terminals A and C. The acceptable frequency for a rental car shuttle, according to Airport officials, is five to seven minutes.

During the summer and early fall of 2003, rental car agencies reduced the frequency of shuttle bus service for business reasons. As a result, customer complaints about long waits for the shuttle buses increased. Some waits were reported to be 15 to 20 minutes. Passengers were also

dissatisfied with the shuttle bus drop-off location at Terminal A. When the Airport changed the pick-up location to the far side of the access road (across the street from Terminal A), the fountain along the middle of the road prevented shuttle buses from crossing from the passenger departure drop-off location to the arrival pick-up location. This meant that shuttle buses servicing Terminal A could not provide satisfactory service to both arriving and departing passengers on the same trip.

If the passenger waiting time becomes too long and complaints increase, the Airport would normally fine Shuttleport, which must keep its buses operating on the agreed schedule. However, fines were not levied last summer and fall against Shuttleport because it was determined that the problem, in part, was due to the reduction in bus frequency by the rental car agencies and the Airport-initiated change in pick-up location. There is no mechanism in the current contract for penalizing the rental car agencies for setting inadequate schedules. Since the long waits were partially due to the presence of the fountain, a decision was made to remove that blockage. Meanwhile, a temporary shuttle bus schedule and route system was put in place that would keep wait times low during the removal process.

In cooperation with the nine rental car companies, Airport management reduced wait times for shuttle buses with a temporary program that increased the number of buses in service by 31% to handle two separate routes for Terminals A and C. The double route system provided increased flexibility to allocate buses to handle passenger loads at arrival and departure locations. The temporary program (which the Airport paid for) went into effect on November 20, 2003. As a result of the program, waiting times decreased to the acceptable seven minutes or less.

By the end of February, a portion of the fountain at Terminal A was removed and the rental car shuttle buses went back to their old schedules and routes, dropping off passengers in front of Terminal A. The extra shuttle loop around Terminal A was discontinued. The waiting times are now monitored throughout the day by Airport management staff, including customer service supervisors for Terminals A and C, as well as a newly created position, Terminal Operations Supervisor.

Taxi Service

Although there are twelve taxi companies servicing the City of San Jose, only two have contracts to provide taxi service to passengers arriving at the Airport. The Airport management has set service standards for these two concessions. Yellow Checker Cab is contracted to service passengers at Terminal A, and United Taxi Cab Corporation is contracted to service passengers at Terminal C. Together, these two companies handle about 400,000 taxi trips per year. Each company is responsible for maintaining a sufficient number of taxis to provide satisfactory service even during peak travel times.

Six other companies are permitted to pick-up passengers on a prearranged basis. Prearranged pick-ups must be made at designated areas of the Airport. Together, these six companies handle about 2,000 rides a year. There are also limousines and door-to-door shuttles available at the Airport. Typically, these services are prearranged and pick-ups are in a designated area of the

Airport. Airport officials told the Grand Jury that there are a sufficient number of limousines and door-to-door shuttles to satisfy customer demand.

Airport management has established an acceptable wait time for a taxi of less than five minutes. During periods of heavy flight arrivals, the wait time for a taxi has at times been up to fifteen minutes. In the past, fines have been levied against the contracted taxi companies due to insufficient taxi coverage. Regardless of increased travel traffic, contract agreements do not allow the taxi companies, limousines, or shuttles to cross over into their non-contracted areas to pick up passengers. Non-concession taxis providing walk-up business can be served with a \$75 fine. The taxi companies have dispatchers at each terminal who monitor compliance with contract rules and assist in providing adequate taxi service.

A seventeen member City of San Jose Taxi Study Advisory Commission, consisting of representatives for drivers, owners, Airport management, and the city, has conducted a study to recommend improvements to citywide taxi service, including Airport service. Airport officials stated that they need to review the commission's findings before taking any measures to decrease taxi wait times at the Airport.

Security Lines

During October 2003, the Grand Jury observed long security lines that extended into the garage in Terminal A, especially during peak travel times. During its inquiry, the Grand Jury found out that TSA was in the midst of increasing its staffing levels. By March 2004, 127 part time screeners were hired corresponding to 76 full time equivalents (FTE), although during the same six month period, 45 FTE left. Thus, TSA screening staff had a net increase of 31 FTE. New hires get one week of classroom training and sixty hours of on-the-job training. Moreover, in Terminal A, security lines at the TSA checkpoint increased from two to three during this six month period (October 2003-March 2004). These three lines branch out into six lanes that go through security screening. In Terminal C, the number of security lines at the TSA checkpoint increased from three to four. There are eight lanes going through security screening. The length of security lines is monitored continuously by Airport management. The Grand Jury has noted a general decrease in the length of security lines since the fall of 2003.

As several airlines do in some other airports around the country, American Airlines has made a business decision to provide a separate line for select passengers in Terminal A. This line merges with the regular line just before the security area. Since all passengers pay the same security fee, this business decision may irk the non-selected passengers if there is a lengthy wait in the regular line. Although the Airport could prohibit separate select lines, it chooses not to interfere with airline operations. The best solution for Airport management is to continue to work with the TSA to keep all security lines short. Meanwhile, the TSA is studying the possible implementation of a "registered traveler program" which would allow prescreened travelers expedited handling through the entire security process.

Signage

During the November 17, 2003, Grand Jury tour of the Airport, it was noted that there were inadequate signs in foreign languages to ease foreign visitors' confusion while navigating through the international terminals. The Grand Jury learned that certain areas of the Airport's foreign and domestic arrival areas are under the Department of Homeland Security's jurisdiction. Therefore, Airport management must comply with the signage restrictions of Homeland Security. These restrictions also apply to the area around the TSA screening stations.

Two signage consultants are working for Airport management. One, on a day-to-day basis, is looking at roadway and international signage. The second is working on a master plan for the central concourse and terminals to be completed in 2013.

Conclusion

The Airport administration has reduced the waiting times for rental car shuttles to seven minutes or less and has staff in place to monitor waiting times for shuttles throughout all hours of operation. Airport staff also monitors waiting times for taxis and works with taxi contractors to maintain good service. Airport officials said they will review the Taxi Study Advisory Commission's findings and recommendations before taking measures to improve taxi service. The Grand Jury notes that the length of security lines has decreased since the fall of 2003 after the federal government authorized more TSA inspectors and training. Airport operations staff monitors the length of security lines and provides feedback to the TSA. Finally, Airport facility managers are working with one signage consultant to improve roadway signs during the construction period and with a second signage consultant to create a signage master plan for informational and directional signs for the entire remodeled Airport.

PASSED and **ADOPTED** by the Santa Clara County Civil Grand Jury on this 6th day of May 2004.

Richard H. Woodward
Foreperson

References

Documents

Airport Improvement Program Facts flyer, January 23, 2004.

Contract between ShuttlePort California, LLC, and City Of San Jose, September 20, 2000.

Ground Transportation Brochure, January 2004.

Letter from TSA Management, March 12, 2004.

Memo from Airport Operations Superintendent, Re: Rental Car Shuttle Bus Pilot Program, November 21, 2003.

Memo from Airport Operations, Re: Bus Service Complaints, November 21, 2003.

Two letters from Airport Operations Manager, December 11, 2003.

Meetings

Airport management staff, January 23, 2004, and April 20, 2004.

Telephone conversations with Airport management, March 9, 2004, and March 10, 2004.

Tours

Grand Jury tour of Airport and facilities on November 17, 2003.