



Southwest's Love Field Modernization Program



Labor of Love

Successful airline reconstructs and renovates Dallas airport

While most airlines struggled—and some went under completely—over the past two to three years, one airline that remained stable and successful was Southwest Airlines, now the largest U.S. carrier of domestic passengers.

A mix of factors has been keeping the airline strong, but loyal customers play a large part. It's easy to be loyal to a company like Southwest, though, as it prides itself on its unwavering commitment to offering high-quality customer service mixed in with warmth, friendliness and company spirit.

Creativity and innovation, concern and respect are just a few of the attributes that define Southwest. The nation's most successful low-fare, high-frequency, point-to-point carrier, the airline operates more than 3,200 flights per day between 69 cities in 35 states.

Yet Southwest is still finding ways to impress. Currently, it's managing the Dallas Love Field modernization program, making one of the best top-of-the-line general-purpose airports in the world a more convenient and efficient place in which to travel. Located in the heart of Dallas, the airport is owned by the city and supported through reasonable user fees and charges.

"Love Field used to be the city's primary airport," says Bob Montgomery, Vice President of Projects for Southwest. "We presently fly more than four million passengers out of there per year. It's not considered a large hub by any means, but we currently have 18 gates operating there and we will be expanding that to 20 gates."



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Besides Southwest, Love Field is served by Continental Express and American Eagle Airlines. Overall, the airport serves seven million passengers annually. The airport’s mission is to provide a safe, efficient and user-friendly airport system that is responsive to customers and their concerns, while continuously improving its commercial and general aviation operations.

SELECTING THE IMPROVEMENTS

Southwest’s Love Field Modernization Program (LFMP) grew from changes in local law. In 1979, the Wright Amendment passed, limiting nonstops flights out of Love Field to destinations within Texas and its five neighboring states. In October 2006, thanks to the airport’s growth and maturity, the law was repealed and all restrictions on flights will be eliminated by 2014.

“The increase in traffic that has resulted from this, coupled with the fact that this is basically a 1956 terminal building, signaled that Love Field needed significant renovation,” explains Montgomery. “The question at that time was if we should paint and patch, or do significant reconstruction. Because the Wright Amendment limited the number of gates at the airport, we had a hard time paying for a full reconstruction.”

As part of the Wright Amendment’s repeal, a cap was put on the amount of money that could be spent at Love Field without an agreement with the city. However, Southwest knew the reconstruction was necessary, and chose to team up with the city on the project. Together, Southwest and the city defined a project that would best suit Love Field.

“Normally, the airport operator would do the renovations and reconstructions at airports,” says Montgomery. “But we felt that if we managed the construction ourselves, we could ensure that we were being very efficient on the delivery and pay attention to the budget and schedule, ultimately supporting a larger project.”

The LFMP’s components include the new 20-gate concourse, a remodeled lobby, an expanded baggage claim area and a new ticketing wing, utilizing space at the airport that currently doesn’t have a primary use or that isn’t used at all.

“The first major thing people will notice is that we will go from a long concourse to a t-shaped concourse by 2013,” says Montgomery. “We are essentially reconstructing everything over the top of ourselves with the exception of the terminal lobby, which is a renovation.”

Significant demolition has already been completed on unused concourses and buildings, along with the replacement of several facilities that would be necessary for construction—tasks Southwest calls enabling projects. Major construction will begin in October.

Ultimately, Love Field will increase efficiency for travelers while maintaining the convenience of a small airport.

DURING CONSTRUCTION

Southwest doesn’t let construction projects get in the way of providing year-round service for its passengers. The airline will still be operating during the LFMP.

“We have a program that is about as good for building on top of yourself as you could have,” declares Montgomery. “The airport’s American and Continental flights will be relocating to a new terminal while we demolish the one they are currently at in order to build a whole new ticketing wing for all carriers. Additionally, the new concourse will occupy the site of an old concourse that has only been used for training purposes, allowing us to make the stem of the ‘t’ without impacting flights one bit.”

Green components will be added in during construction, as Southwest promised the City of Dallas that the LFMP will earn LEED Silver certification. Southwest is using a range of strategies to achieve LEED Silver, from using recyclable materials to installing low-flow toilets.

“Southwest always tries to build sustainably, but very rarely do we put the emphasis on achieving LEED status—which we’re doing on this project as a direct result of it being a public-private partnership,” says Montgomery.

It won’t take long once the LFMP opens to the public for Southwest to know if the public-private partnership was a success, but it’s on its way.

“We are trying to create a close and convenient facility that really responds to the needs of our customers. They have endured a lot of congestion and an old facility. Now, the airport will be light, airy, open and friendly, enabling people to really focus on a positive travel experience,” says Montgomery. “We will know on day one if it’s successful. And then, on day three or four when we obtain our LEED certification, we will know if that has been successful as well.”

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