

Airlines, Transportation Department scramble to meet security deadline

By Seth Borenstein
Knight Ridder Newspapers

WASHINGTON (KRT) - Federal transportation and airline officials concede that they haven't figured out how to screen all checked luggage for bombs, with only days to go to meet a legal deadline. But they promise to do it by Jan. 18.

Somehow. "We do not have a specific plan yet," Department of Transportation spokesman Hank Price said Tuesday. That's despite daily meetings with airlines, and aviation security personnel working through the holidays. The nation's airlines don't have a plan either, officials acknowledged, and the solutions are likely to vary by airport and by airline.

Whatever the security system chosen, passengers should expect confusion and longer-than-ever delays in airports beginning Jan. 18, experts say.

"I just don't see, operationally, how all airports can be compliant," said Charlie LeBlanc, managing director of Air Security International, a Houston aviation security consulting firm. "And if we're not, what are we going to do? Nobody has the answers or nobody wants to talk about it."

The Jan. 18 deadline is just one of four upcoming hurdles spelled out in the aviation security law that President Bush signed Nov. 19. Starting Feb. 1, the Department of Transportation must collect a \$2.50 security fee from each passenger on every flight. On Feb. 17, a new federal agency, the Transportation Security Administration, must take over responsibility for aviation security from the Federal Aviation Administration. Soon after that, TSA personnel must take over passenger and bag-screening duty, now handled by private firms.

It all starts with checked bags. Under the new Aviation Security Act, each piece must be searched by hand or by a bomb-detecting machine, a bomb-sniffing dog or an X-ray machine. As a fallback, the law allows airlines to meet the new requirement by confirming that each checked bag belongs to a passenger who has boarded the plane.

The easiest option, experts say, is the fallback, known as 100 percent bag matching. But it has a big problem: While it prevents a terrorist from planting a bomb in an aircraft's luggage

New airport security system

Highlights of airport security bill passed by the House and Senate:



Baggage screeners

All workers will be federal employees within one year; airports can take back control after three years; alternative system tested at five airports



Checked bags

Inspections within 60 days; explosive detectors used on all bags by end of 2002



Database of suspects

New computer federal law enforcement watch lists; "trusted

passenger" list for frequent fliers; new links between airline and Customs computers



Airplane security

Stronger cockpit doors; only flight crew in cockpit; video camera will let pilots see passengers; more sky marshals; marshals on all "high-risk" flights; weapons in cockpits possible; switch for flight crew to alert pilot

New agency

Transportation Dept. office for transportation security

New passenger fee

\$2.50 to \$5 per flight

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hold and walking away, it won't stop a suicidal terrorist like those aboard hijacked aircraft Sept. 11.

Moreover, 100 percent bag matching can cause substantial delays. The problem occurs when luggage without an owner is found, explained Geoff Askew, security chief of Qantas Airlines, the Australian carrier, which adopted the system a decade ago. At the start, he said, about 1 flight in 10 was delayed an hour or longer to unload, find and remove baggage without accompanying passengers.

Each of the other security options also has drawbacks, experts say.

Explosive-detection machines are everybody's favorite choice, and the law mandates them by 2003. But there aren't enough of them, they can't be built fast enough and the current models trigger too many false alarms, experts say. They are also expensive: The 2,200 machines the nation's airports need will cost \$5 billion.

Enhanced X-ray machines, while not as effective as explosive-detection machines, can be built faster and more cheaply. But there aren't

enough of them either, said Cabal Flynn, a former Federal Aviation Administration security chief who retired in 2000.

Bomb-sniffing dogs are a sentimental favorite, but they, too, are in short supply, and training a new dog takes 11 weeks, FAA spokeswoman Rebecca Terrell said. The FAA has 175 dog-trainer teams at 39 airports and plans to increase that to 313 teams at the 80 busiest airports by the end of 2003, Terrell said.

Hand-searching every bag — the solution on which Israeli air security relies — would take more trained searchers and more time. It takes about 10 minutes per bag, experts said, or up to two hours additional waiting time per flight. It also takes space, which many airports lack.

Hand searches offer real deterrence. But if this option is chosen, expect "an absolute nightmare" of delays, said Tony Potter, former head of security at Tampa International Airport, now a Seattle consultant.

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Officials approve Dixon expansion

By Kristy Hessman
OSU Barometer

After two months of waiting with their fingers crossed, OSU officials have been given the green light to begin construction on the long-awaited Dixon Recreation Center expansion project.

The \$19 million project was put on hold in October, two weeks before groundbreaking was set to begin, when the Oregon University System decided to rethink the model in which student funds are allocated for building projects within Oregon's public universities.

The delay worried both OSU officials and students, who have waited more than 15 years and spent more than \$1.5 million in student fees on the planning and architecture leading up to the expansion.

A newly expanded recreation center including 80,000 additional square feet, a suspended running track, new basketball courts and weight equipment, is scheduled to be completed no later than fall 2003.

While the approval of funding is welcome news to the OSU community, some members of the OUS Administrative Council were critical of the process that was used to obtain it.

"I have no complaint about the (Dixon) project, but about the process in which it was decided," said Dan Williams, University of Oregon vice president for administration and a council member.

Williams said he was surprised the approval went through the way it was because the funding for the project was originally estimated and brought to the board at a figure closer to \$10 million, rather than \$19 million.

The original planning totaled \$10 to \$12 million, but the costs in general work was greater than at first anticipated.

The actual costs for direct construction total \$15 million, while planning and permits make up the remaining \$4 million.

"The process was ignored as I understand it," Williams said, adding that he thinks it may put other universities at a disadvantage once a final financial model is decided on.

OUS is currently discussing a model in which each university will keep the money it puts in for its own campuses, with the three larger campuses — OSU, UO and PSU — contributing 8 percent of their funds to the smaller campuses for a more fair distribution of funds.

"It was not proven that there was a disadvantage to other schools, although there were concerns," said Mark McCambridge, OSU vice president of finance and administration.

The new financial model will be the topic of conversation at the next OUS Administrative Council meeting in late January, when a possible decision will be made.

Weapons plan may include loophole

By Warren P. Strobel
Knight Ridder Newspapers

WASHINGTON (KRT) - Thousands of U.S. nuclear warheads that President Bush plans to take out of operation in a disarmament agreement with Russia may be put into storage for possible later use rather than destroyed, according to a classified Pentagon nuclear weapons plan presented to Congress on Tuesday.

The plan, described by U.S. officials who were briefed on its contents, appears to raise new questions about the finality of Bush's pledge to cut the U.S. nuclear arsenal to between 1,700 and 2,200 warheads from its level of almost 6,000.

It also could provoke a storm of protest from Moscow, where Russian President Vladimir Putin would like a formal treaty permanently enshrining the cuts, as opposed to the more informal accord Bush prefers.

The Pentagon plan, called the Nuclear Posture Review, says that some of the nuclear warheads taken off of land-based missiles, bombers and submarines could be put in storage "as a hedge force" and redeployed if needed, according to a U.S. official. He spoke on condition of anonymity.

"They would always have the flexibility to redeploy those warheads if circumstances change," the official said.

On another topic, nuclear testing, the Pentagon document says that the Energy Department's nuclear weapons labs should be in a position to resume underground testing more rapidly than they can now if the president makes a decision to do so.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said Tuesday that Bush will continue, for now, to observe a self-imposed moratorium on underground nuclear testing that the elder President Bush initiated in 1992.

But, Rumsfeld said, "any country that has nuclear weapons has to be respectful of the enormous lethality and power of those weapons, and has a responsibility to see that they are safe and reliable ... To the extent that can be done without testing, clearly that is the preference."

The United States and Russia agreed last month to try to finish an agreement slashing their nuclear arsenals during the first half of 2002.

Under U.S. policy, the labs must be able to resume testing within 24 to 36 months of a decision by the president

to test. The new Pentagon report says the labs should make preparations so that the window could be shortened, perhaps to a year.

But a senior Bush aide, speaking on condition of anonymity, recently told Knight Ridder that, in the proposed agreement, Washington wants the flexibility to deploy nuclear weapons above the 1,700-2,200 level that Bush promised Putin at their November summit if circumstances warrant.

That, some Democratic lawmakers and arms control advocates protest, would give Russia no incentive to destroy its own warheads that are taken off active duty. And warheads stored in Russia likely will be less secure than those stored in the United States, they note.

But senior White House and Pentagon officials have argued that formal, Cold War-style arms control agreements are obsolete and the United States should be free to adjust its nuclear arsenal upward or downward based on its security needs.

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