

# Filled to capacity

➤ **CAPACITY HAS BEEN THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND EXPANSION PLANS AT PARIS-CHARLES DE GAULLE AIRPORT. TO ACCOMMODATE GROWING PASSENGER NUMBERS, KEY OPERATOR AIR FRANCE HAS CHOSEN TO ADDRESS TWO KEY AREAS - INFRASTRUCTURE AND CUSTOMER SERVICES.**

Capacity pressure is common at major international airports and Air France-KLM's important hub at Paris-Charles de Gaulle (CDG) is no exception. Expanding the airport's size and adding new buildings, however, is just part of the ambitious project under way at CDG.

The growing volume of travellers taking connecting flights from CDG is one of many reasons behind Air France-KLM's growing profits, with routes to Asia, Latin America and Africa leading the growth. The airline, and CDG as a whole, know that the focus cannot be solely on physical infrastructure – improving the quality of service is also high on the agenda.

Capacity is, perhaps, the most obvious issue to tackle, particularly as the collapse of terminal 2E in 2004 put more pressure on the airport's infrastructure. Not long after it had been opened, part of the terminal's ceiling fell near gate E50, killing four people.

In 2005, Aéroports de Paris (ADP) opted to tear down and rebuild the collapsed 2E 'jetty' in a €100 million project. The new construction will not replicate the former concrete tube design but will have a more traditional steel and glass structure. The new 2E is expected to reopen around April to May 2008. Until then, the airport will have to rely on temporary departure lounges constructed near the terminal.

CDG would have faced an urgent need to invest physical infrastructure to extend capacity, even without the collapse of 2E. It currently handles 35 million passengers each year, but this is likely to grow rapidly as CDG becomes a more important European hub. Overall, its current development program will enable it to handle 55 million travellers annually.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

Air France has focused on improving its baggage handling. The airline has invested heavily in infrastructure with ADP – and in technological development with KLM. This demanding policy has included the implementation of the TBE baggage handling system at CDG, which has boosted Air France to a leading position against rival carriers, with only 15.6 late deliveries for every 1,000 bags over its entire network in the first six months of 2007.

Air France, alongside KLM, is also the first to experiment with radio frequency identification (RFID) technology for tracking baggage between Paris, Amsterdam and Tokyo.



**SELF-SERVICE TAKES ROOT**

Air France customers can already buy their tickets at the cheapest rate online and the airline uses e-ticketing extensively. Some 95% of all tickets for routes on the Air France network are currently issued electronically and the airline is on target to meet the IATA objective of 100% electronic ticketing by the end of May 2008.

This, however, is only the tip of the iceberg for self-service and automation. Air France passengers now commonly use self-service kiosks (SSK), which enable passengers to quickly check in and print their boarding cards. Today, up to 30% of Air France customers use these SSKs on departures from France and Europe. New SSKs will soon be deployed at CDG for connecting passengers; 70 kiosks will be installed in total, first in terminal 2E and then in all other terminals.

As self-service becomes more familiar to passengers, Air France is looking at the next stage, which is self-boarding. The airline will be running a trial on Paris to Amsterdam flights, in which customers will be almost totally autonomous on their trip through the terminal. Using a personalised card incorporating biometric security features, RFID chips and thermal printing, passengers will be able to pass through security screening without waiting and board the plane whenever they wish.



'Satellite 3 has a mix of medium and long-haul flights, 2G will be a regional terminal, while Satellite 4 will be dedicated to long-haul flights. That makes operations easier to manage, as we have the advantage of Satellite 3 being able to handle different kinds of flights,' says Pascal de Izaguirre, the executive vice president of ground operations for Air France.

**Infrastructure**

Plans for expansion began with the reconstruction of Terminal 2E but there have been other major developments. In June, Satellite 3 opened, though the final of three phased sequences to make it fully operational will only conclude at the end of 2008.

**'We are experimenting with automated self-boarding, which could be fully automated with biometric security checks.'**



**PASCAL DE IZAGUIRRE**

➤ Pascal de Izaguirre joined the Air France Group in 1992, as the deputy vice president of international relations. Since January 2000, he has held the post of executive vice president of ground operations and has sat on the executive committee.

➤ He has been a member of the board of directors at Air France since 2005 and Servair since 2000.

Satellite 3 is a large boarding complex built by ADP with the collaboration of Air France-KLM, which intended to shorten transfer times between connecting flights and eliminate the lengthy bus journeys passengers must currently take.

The development adds jetways for large aeroplanes, most importantly the Airbus 380. Check in and baggage handling for satellite 3 will use the existing infrastructure in terminals 2E and 2F. Over time, Air France will move its traffic to terminals 2C, 2D, 2E and 2F, leaving 2A and 2B for other carriers.

In autumn 2008, the new Terminal 2G will open; it will be fully dedicated to regional flights. Operating as a schengen terminal (with no customs control) for Air France's regional and European traffic, it will offer faster turnaround times for small capacity planes.

By 2012, Satellite 4 will be complete. Dedicated to long-haul flights it will also accommodate the A380 Airbus. Like Satellite 3, it will rely on check in and baggage handling infrastructure at 2E and 2F.

The performance of the new infrastructure will no doubt be enhanced by the new hub control centre (hub CC) opened in March, 2007. The 110 staff in this 1,700 metre-squared building will focus on optimising flight punctuality and co-ordinating flight connections.

**Customer service**

Many additions will improve customer experience, including the automated people-mover between 2E and Satellite 3. Other developments are about minimising disruption, as with the addition of security checkpoints, to ensure passengers can still board their planes with ease. One key behind-the-scenes improvement, however, is the new TBE baggage handling system. With over 90,000 Air France passengers transiting CDG each day, the airline has to handle over 34,000 items of connecting baggage daily. Started in October 2007, the TBE system has the capacity to handle 15,600 items each hour and will be further improved by a new baggage sorting module in 2012.

Other technologies will also be crucial, as Air France considers the digital airport of the future. E-services will include not only booking flights online but choosing your seat and printing your boarding card on the internet. More advanced applications already available include mobile phone check in services for short and medium-haul flights; these are expected to develop much further in the next few years.

'These technologies give the customer flexibility, especially business travellers. We will be experimenting with automated self-boarding, which could be fully automated with biometric security checks. Passengers will be able to skip all the queues at the gate, as well as at check in,' comments de Izaguirre. 'On-board services are standardised, but in ground services there is a lot of room for improvement.' ○