

Eye spy

Amsterdam's Schiphol airport and a growing number of US airports have sanctioned the use of fingerprint recognition or iris scanning, which will allow frequent flyers to dispense with customs and immigration forms at international airports. **Jim Banks** asks whether this unprecedented co-operation is defining the future of airport security.

The use of biometric security systems in airport passenger handling processes has been widely discussed since 2001, when the terrorist attack on New York brought the world's attention to security at airports. And yet iris scanning or fingerprint recognition technology has been confined largely to the control of employees accessing restricted areas. Now, however, programmes in the US and Europe are bringing biometrics firmly into the passenger domain.

Late last year, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) proposed that Global Entry, a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) voluntary initiative using biometric identification to streamline international arrivals and admission processes for trusted travellers, should evolve from a pilot scheme to a permanent programme. Its aim is to expedite customs and security processes to allow the DHS to

refocus its inspection efforts. The Global Entry scheme currently operates at 20 US international airports, where kiosks allow members of the scheme to insert passports or lawful permanent resident cards into a document reader, compare digital fingerprints with images on file and then pass quickly through security. It has reduced average wait times by 70%, and over 75% of travellers using the system are processed in under five minutes. It is estimated that Global Entry has saved CBP 2,500 inspectional hours.

Now, Global Entry is hooking up to the international network through the Fast Low-Risk Universal Crossing (FLUX) alliance – a multilateral governmental partnership that constitutes the first intercontinental trusted travellers programme. FLUX is a cooperation between US (CBP) and NL (Ministry of Justice) Governments that Schiphol supports actively.

E.M.H. Hirsch Ballin

Mr Hirsch Ballin, Minister of Justice, was government commissioner for the review of legislation, member of the Board of the Netherlands Atlantic Association.



Jos Nijhuis

Jos Nijhuis has been president and CEO of the Schiphol group since 1 January 2009. He is also a member of the management board as well as a Member of Supervisory Board of SNS Reaal and the Board of Aéroports de Paris SA.



John Wagner

John Wagner joined the US Customs Service in 1991. He was assigned to the Office of Field Operations at Headquarters from 1999. He is the director of Trusted Traveler Programs for US Customs and Border Protection/Department of Homeland Security.



It entitles Privium frequent flyer participants leaving the Netherlands to preferential treatment in the US after verification of an iris scan at the European end and fingerprint identification in the US.

“This type of collaboration is not only beneficial to CBP, Schiphol Airport and the Government of the Netherlands, but it offers tremendous time savings for frequent international travellers,” remarks Jos Nijhuis, Schiphol Group CEO.

“The FLUX programme has proven to be successful for the thousands of travellers that have applied and are utilising it today. It is a great example of increased security and facilitation with a win-win for all involved. Linking the individual security systems together creates a network of trust. Combining this with one-stop-shop application procedures for travellers, FLUX really lives up to its promise: Seamless Travel, Simplifying Business.”

Courage and commitment

FLUX has drawn on previous experience on both sides of the Atlantic. CBP, for

instance, used the NEXUS programme as a starting point, which it jointly administers with the Canada Border Services Agency. NEXUS allows pre-screened, frequent travellers expedited processing by US and Canadian officials at land borders and through kiosks at Canadian Preclearance airports. Such experiences have helped FLUX to mature quickly.

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“Combining this with one-stop-shop application procedures for travellers, FLUX really lives up to its promise: Seamless Travel, Simplifying Business.”

Netherlands have been in collaboration for several years to reach an agreement on reciprocal trusted traveller benefits. Our partnership is a great example of how trusted travellers will experience seamless international travel while allowing our CBP officers to concentrate their efforts on potentially higher-risk travellers and goods,” remarks John Wagner, director of

the CBP’s Trusted Traveller Programs.

Key to the programme’s effectiveness is the ability to discriminate in more detail between passenger groups.

“Conventionally, border authorities regard all passengers as one homogenous group,” comments Ernst Hirsch-Ballin, Netherlands Minister of Justice “This means that all passengers are in principle subjected to the same treatment, in order to ensure safety

and security. Of course, most passengers don’t pose a high risk, but in the current situation we are not in a position to make clear-cut distinctions.

“Projections are that passenger numbers will rise significantly towards 2020 and beyond, possibly doubling or tripling. We will still need to maintain a high level of security. Simply increasing the available personnel at

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FLUX is a governmental partnership facilitating international travelers end-to-end through national border crossing fast lanes of participating countries. Since more countries are expected to join the FLUX Alliance shortly, a growing network of fast lanes becomes available.



Global Entry and Privium are members of the FLUX Alliance



the border would be cost inefficient and a logistical nightmare. The passenger flow would become congested. 21st century border issues require 21st century solutions.”

Before trusted traveller status is awarded, border authorities in the US and the Netherlands conduct background screenings to create a more complete view of each individual as the basis of a risk assessment. The agreed parameters are strict to ensure FLUX participants are low-risk, and background screening is regularly redone.

“First and foremost it is the passenger that benefits from the co-operation,” notes Hirsch-Ballin. “FLUX participants no longer have to fill in customs and immigration forms, apart from ESTA. Travelling between the participating airports becomes seamless, resulting in a more comfortable journey and a more welcome stay at the airports. Secondly, it’s an improvement to the security at airports and on airplanes.”

The programme has brought its fair share of challenges, largely around data sharing and privacy concerns, but the eagerness of all parties to co-operate has been the driving force in overcoming them. The European Parliament and European Commission support the pilot scheme, as do the governments and agencies directly involved in its delivery. Furthermore, legal issues have been minimal.

“While each country does have differing laws and regulations, there is little effect on this type of collaboration,” explains the CPB’s John Wagner. “There are technical and procedural challenges that remain. However, these challenges are not insurmountable. Both countries are working diligently to correct any outstanding issues.”

Nijhuis concurs: information must be shared. Firstly the traveller information, which travellers provide directly and on a voluntary basis. This is done via one internet application form. This methodology, however, fits the local privacy regulations. The other

information element is the exchange of the results of national background checks, but only the result – approved or not approved – is shared with the US and vice versa. The result is minimum information sharing that could be done in the legal frameworks of NL and US, but with maximum result.”

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Blueprint for the future

The choice of biometric technology could also have been a stumbling block for an international programme, but FLUX has left this choice to each jurisdiction. Hence the US uses fingerprints and the Netherlands uses iris scans.

“The choice of technology, at least for Privium, was based upon a trade-off of security, efficiency and convenience, with different stakeholders representing those needs. Security requirements were mainly government-driven, convenience was the main concern of the aviation sector, and efficiency a combination of both,” says Nijhuis. “Iris recognition at Schiphol was chosen at the time because it offered the best trade-off between reliability, security and convenience because there are very few false acceptances and hardly any false rejections. Iris recognition is also user-friendly and hygienic as well as innovative.”

In fact, the biggest drawback with iris scanning is the human element. The technology currently in use requires users to adapt to a new system, and although the technology itself has progressed rapidly in recent years it takes time for users to catch up. Schiphol has, however, conducted best practice tests with ‘iris at a distance’ technology, which is capable of capturing an

iris at a glance and at a distance, which could spectacularly improve not only the error rate due to the human factor, but also increase passenger throughput.

With technological, data sharing and legal issues largely overcome, FLUX is expected to expand to more countries after successful

validation of the pilot scheme in May 2010. US and Dutch border authorities are already in talks with their Canadian counterparts, who may join the alliance this year, and collaboration with the UK and Germany is high on the agenda.

“FLUX gamers significant support from the private sector, uses a risk-based approach to determine a traveller’s low-risk status, and allows CBP and the Netherlands to focus resources on potentially higher-risk travellers and goods, while facilitating legitimate trade and travel,” says CBP’s Wagner. It is an innovative best practice, which has improved the arrival process and passenger processing efficiency in both countries. CBP and the Government of the Netherlands are dedicated to its success and will continue working to increase membership and programme.”

Hirsch-Ballin sees great potential, but believes care and time are still needed.

“The parties involved foresee expansion, but before the FLUX alliance can be expanded there must be a robust programme in place. All processes must be clear, the technical infrastructure must function flawlessly and all the minor inconveniences need to be straightened out. Herein lie challenges, but I have no reason to doubt that these will be overcome.” ■