

# Safe and sound

The failed Christmas Day bombing plot in the US in 2009 once again propelled airport security to the top of the international agenda. **Mike Fazackerley**, security director at Manchester Airports Group, talks to Jim Banks about the airport's decision to install full-body scanners and the advantages the technology offers to passengers and staff.

**W**hen security staff at Manchester Airport decided to trial a full-body scanner in November 2009 the aim was to improve passenger convenience rather than bolster security. But by the time the £120,000 unit went live the following January, airport security teams were once again on high alert following the failed Christmas Day bombing plot in the US. Manchester, it turned out, had made a fortuitous decision.

"We ordered the scanner because we strongly believe that the route to better security is to offer better service," explains Mike Fazackerley of the security directory at Manchester Airports Group (MAG).

## A safety first

As a result of the successful trial, Manchester now has 13 working units. As one of the earliest adopters of the system, it has built up two years of experience with the devices; initially, however, the learning curve for staff was a steep one.

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"When we originally had just one scanner as an extra measure at the back of the search area, we found that – because people had been through the normal processes and were then asked to go through the scanner – the level of concern



Thanks to the new scanners, pat downs are a thing of the past and fewer security staff are required.

was much higher. People were saying 'Why was I selected?'" explains Fazackerley. Manchester's system has since become far more sophisticated and acceptable to the majority of passengers.

The primary check remains the ubiquitous and universally accepted metal detector. In this case, as well as producing an alarm when it detects suspicious objects, it is also programmed to do so for a random number of passengers who are not

detected as carrying metal objects. These individuals are then asked to go through the full-body scanner. The advantage of this process, says Fazackerley, is that there are no issues about how people are selected, as passengers are aware that the scanner sounded when they walked through.

Manchester's operational experience has been that both passengers and staff have found the full-body scanners instinctively easy to use. For example, passengers asked to go through them are confronted by a 6ft-high yellow stick person demonstrating the correct pose. During busy periods, people see the person in front using the machine, so by and large people do not need to be trained to use it.

"We have found it really easy to communicate with customers what we want them to do," says Fazackerley. "As

you might imagine, the young customers get it straight away. We have had three-year-olds hopping in and adopting the pose, just like that. Older people are a little more enquiring, but broadly speaking there are no difficulties whatsoever. In fact, we have less trouble with people doing the right things in the scanners than we traditionally had with pat downs, where people quite often stood wrongly or were not sure what was being asked of them.”

Thanks to Manchester’s scanners, pat downs no longer take place. This has two principle advantages. The first is that surveys always demonstrated that the one thing that people hated about the pat down was the physical contact; people simply disliked being touched. The second benefit is that by replacing the pat down with the full-body scanner, the airport has achieved a significant cost saving amounting to a two-year return-on-investment on the £120,000 cost of each machine. It is no longer necessary to have both male and female security personnel at each checkpoint. A single operative suffices.

While the use of the scanners has not slowed the passenger movement, Fazackerley says it has not increased the flow either. If the scanner operator, positioned at a remote location in the airport, has grounds for concern, the passenger is merely invited to go through the scanner a second time. If after that there



Established scanning procedures have ensured that the rate of passenger refusal is just 1:190,000.

better images than the rival millimetre wave technology. He is not prepared, however, to place bets on which system will become the most widely adopted.

Millimetre wave proponents argue that X-ray technology is inherently more dangerous. However, an October 2010 report from the US Department of Health and Human Services concluded that the radiation exposure was miniscule, even for frequent fliers. In any event, there also remain health concerns about exposure to radio waves. Fazackerley says that as an early adopter MAG has attracted more fact-finding visits from regulators and MPs than it has from other airport operators. MAG has also gone out of its way to demonstrate the scanners to religious authorities and

### Insurance savings

According to Mike Fazackerley, Manchester Airport has actually seen a fall in its insurance bill as a result of the new scanners.

“We brought our insurance people in to show them how the scanners worked,” he says. “There has been no increase in premiums. In fact, I can’t give you the figure, but in terms of our terrorism risk the premium went down. Clearly the more we invest in security the better we are positioned in terms of avoiding a terrorist act that affects the cost of our insurance.”

If a passenger arrives at the airport, ignorant of or refusing to accept the new scanning arrangements, there is an established procedure. “If somebody expresses concern at security, then we have a well-practised process of making sure that they get the right information and that the team leader gets involved early, so that we can deal with their concerns,” says Fazackerley. “We do not often find ourselves in a refusal situation. At the moment I think the rate of refusal is one person in every 190,000 – that is very low. And it is made quite clear that if they refuse, they don’t fly.”

It is also made clear the image data is wiped from the system once a passenger has been cleared through a full-body scanner. “As an industry, airports have to deliver security in a way that our customers find acceptable. Our feedback on scanners is that retaining data would be a step too far. Passengers are willing to go through scanners but there is an absolute feeling that their privacy must not be breached.” ■

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are still problems, that individual is escorted to a private cubicle for a full search.

Fazackerley says there have been few training issues. Staff understand that if they do not do their job properly, the system will not work. A large number of independent covert tests keep people on their toes.

### Radiation concerns

Image quality produced by the backscatter X-ray technology of the Rapiscan Secure 1000 single pose scanners could be better, admits Fazackerley, but this is first generation technology. He thinks backscatter is faster and currently produces

other special interest groups, such as the British Transplantation Society, to address their various concerns. A close watch has also been kept on passenger reactions.

“Our last survey three months ago showed that 95% of passengers who had been scanned said that they had absolutely no concern about the process whatsoever,” says Fazackerley, “but nonetheless if you can reach the remaining 5% in advance of the process, you are better off.” MAG has so far handled the publicity process itself but Fazackerley admits that getting the message across to that last 5% may require a higher level of marketing expertise.