

MidAmerica Airport celebrates opening of expanded passenger terminal

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Occurring during the silver anniversary year from the start of MidAmerica St. Louis Airport in St. Clair County, a celebration/grand opening of its expanded passenger terminal took place on Tuesday afternoon, June 13.

Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker and several other key stakeholders gathered with more than 100 invited guests to officially cut the ribbon for the new facility, which expands the existing 53,500-square-foot terminal by an additional 41,000-plus square feet to accommodate continuing passenger growth and provide a host of new amenities that will enhance the experience for those traveling through MidAmerica St. Louis Airport.

The \$31 million, multi-year project funded by the county, state and Federal Aviation Administration was necessary to accommodate the continually growing usage of the airport and in anticipation of the addition of more arriving and departing flights, including those connected to Mexico, in the not-too-distant future. The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) had provided \$7 million in funding toward the project, with another \$24 million coming from federal funding.

As part of his address during this ceremony, Pritzker summarized some of the many components included in the new part of the airport terminal, “some obvious, some maybe less,” such as “an expanded departure lounge with added room for concessions, new family restrooms, a nursing room, two additional boarding bridges, a faster baggage handling system, modernized (Transportation Security Administration) screening, a service animal relief area, a below-ground storm shelter and ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act)-compliant renovations to accommodate people with disabilities.”

Those enhancements to serve individuals with disabilities include recessed fixtures, a larger elevator, visual paging capability and wider/accessible seating.

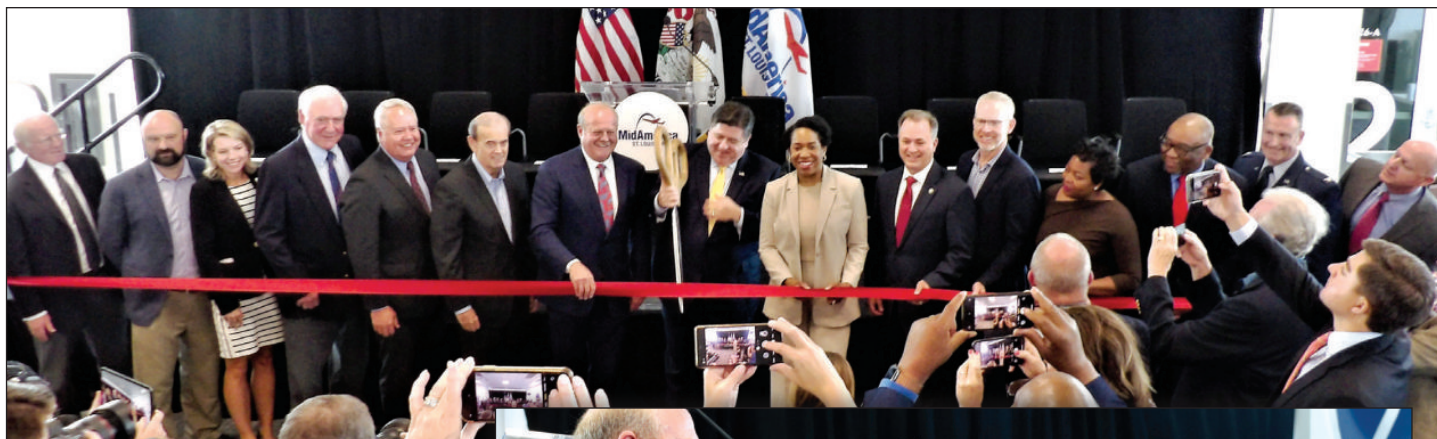
“This tremendous new terminal is part of a larger picture of progress for Illinois’ economy, not to mention the Metro-East,” Pritzker continued. “Our state is proud to boast of one of the best and largest aviation systems in the entire nation.”

St. Clair County Board Chairman Mark Kern, along with introducing many government officials and industry professionals in attendance, told those present that MidAmerica St. Louis Airport is the fifth busiest in all of Illinois and that includes international giant locations such as Midway and O’Hare in the Chicago area.

Reminding his listeners not to forget “our friends across the runway,” Kern further stated, “Scott Air Force Base is here today because this airport was built,” along with auxiliary projects such as a new central tower, additional housing for military personnel and an elementary school for their children.

The opening of the airport, he went on, helped make Scott “BRAC-proof” in reference to the federal review of such installations called the Base Relocation and Closing program which led to the shut down of similar facilities elsewhere in the nation including one near Kansas City, Mo., earlier this century.

Located at the intersection of Illinois Route 4 and Interstate 64 and referred to by its aviation designation of BLV because of its proximity to Belleville, this airport’s new facility opening represents the climax of a complete turnaround from its early days when there was no flight traffic there and it was the subject of critical scrutiny from



MidAmerica St. Louis Airport celebrated the opening of its recent terminal expansion with a ribbon-cutting ceremony that included numerous stakeholders from the local, regional, state and federal levels. Shown from left are former St. Clair County Board Chairman John Baricevic, State Reps. Kevin Schmidt and Erica Harriss, St. Clair County Public Building Commission Chairman Rich Sauget, State Rep. Jay Hoffman, former Congressman Jerry Costello, St. Clair County Board Chairman Mark Kern, Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton, Regional FAA Administrator Erik Amend, Allegiant Airlines Director of Airport Affairs Thayne Klinger, former State Rep. Latoya Greenwood, State Sen. Christopher Belt, 375th Air Mobility Wing Commander Col. Christopher Robinson and MidAmerica St. Louis Airport Director Bryan Johnson. (Randy Pierce/Herald Publications)



St. Clair County Board Chairman Mark Kern, Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton and Regional FAA Administrator Erik Amend are all smiles as the ribbon is cut at MidAmerica St. Louis’ recent terminal expansion celebration held on June 13. (Office of the Governor)

numerous sources like the news departments of St. Louis television stations.

Among the nine speakers who took turns at the podium as part of the grand opening celebration, Illinois State Representative Jay Hoffman recalled those years when the airport project was being viewed negatively, commenting, “There were a lot of critics at the time and I guess I’m the only individual left in the (Illinois) General Assembly who voted for the original state funding for this, but those critics were wrong. The vision of (former state representative) Latoya Greenwood, (Illinois Senator) Christopher Belt, Lieutenant Governor (Juliana) Stratton, Governor Pritzker, and I like to say myself, has become a reality and we’re creating jobs and economic opportunity in this area.”

A large percentage of the cost of the expansion, which took nearly five years from inception until completion, was borne by the FAA which provided nearly \$25 million in support with another \$6 million coming from the state for the building and its interior components.

The celebration saw Bryan Johnson, director of the airport, serving as master of ceremonies with the other guest speakers including two mentioned by Hoffman (Belt and Stratton) plus Erik Amend, regional administrator for the Great Lakes Region of the Federal Aviation Administration; Thayne Klinger, director of airport affairs for MidAmerica St. Louis Airport’s passenger service provider Allegiant Airlines; Rich Sauget, chairman of the St. Clair County Public Building Commission that oversees the airport’s operations; and Colonel Christopher Robinson, commander of the 375 Air Mobility Wing at Scott Air Force Base.

“Modernization” was the term used by Johnson to characterize what was happening, expressing his appreciation for how the appropriate leaders at the federal, state and local levels recognized the importance of this terminal in advance of a larger number of passengers using the services provided there, something that has been significant since the winding

down of the coronavirus pandemic with many more people now traveling by air.

Official announcements received following the event shared further notes, including that, for the last 25 years, MidAmerica St. Louis Airport has been one of the busiest airports for passenger travel in Illinois.

“The MidAmerica Airport is a \$3 billion a year economic engine for the Metro East, and this new terminal will only make that number grow,” said State Senator Christopher Belt (D-Swansea).

The new terminal has been delivered through the collaborative efforts of Holland Construction Services and the many subcontractors who worked on the project. Renovation of the existing terminal is currently underway as Phase Four of the overall project and will include many of the same upgrades as the terminal expansion, while also delivering baggage handling system improvements, a new gift shop, community conference room and enhancements to the passenger drop-off area outside the terminal. The final improvements will be complete by late 2023.

The passenger terminal expansion is not the only improvement project happening at MidAmerica St. Louis Airport. A \$37.7 million project to add nearly 3,100 linear feet of new Taxiway Lima pavement and a new Taxiway Bridge over Crooked Creek is under construction. It will serve Boeing’s new production facility, which is slated for opening in 2024 and has the potential to spark future aviation development.

MetroLink’s expansion from Scott Air Force Base to MidAmerica St. Louis Airport is also moving forward and will make the airport even more accessible to potential customers all along the light rail alignment and provide a direct connection to St. Louis Lambert International Airport.

To learn more about MidAmerica St. Louis Airport (BLV), visit www.flymidamerica.com or follow the airport on Facebook, www.facebook.com/midamericabl.

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