

Getting LAX Off the Ground

Much needed renovations to the airport could provide a lift to L.A.'s tourism and trade industries.

By **RUSSELL GOLDSMITH**

THIS summer, millions of travelers will board flights to and from Los Angeles. Many of them will come here hoping to enjoy our city's unique creative energy and lifestyle – its world-famous beaches, amusement parks, recreational activities,

shops and cultural attractions.

These travelers could contribute significantly to our local economy. But first, they will step into an airport that hasn't been fully renovated since Ronald Reagan was president and our city was preparing for the 1984 Olympics. And it shows.

From London and Shanghai to Dubai and Denver, the world's leading cities are making the investments necessary to compete for the critical economic benefits that accompany international trade and tourism.

Ours is a 21st century city that must have a 21st century airport – one that is capable of accommodating more travelers and larger, more

fuel-efficient aircraft, safely, productively and in style. A decade ago, only two other airports in the world received more visitors than Los Angeles International Airport, but now our airport ranks sixth. With unemployment in Los Angeles hovering around 12 percent, we can't afford to lose more ground.

Also at risk is L.A.'s vital share of international trade. Each year, LAX handles some \$80 billion of high-value products and merchandise – from custom handbags to iPads. But today many planes have the fuel capacity to fly past LAX and distribute their cargo through other U.S. cities.



Flight Path: Signage at Los Angeles International Airport.

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LAX is critical to the economy and quality of life in Los Angeles and this region of 15 million people. The airport is responsible – directly or indirectly – for one of every 20 jobs here.

The good news is that for the first time since 1984 some significant progress is being made – thanks to the strong leadership of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and his airport's executive director, Gina Marie Lindsey. Most notable are the new international terminal now being built and the new concessionaires on the way. But despite the improvements, much more needs to be done at LAX.

The Los Angeles Coalition for the Economy and Jobs, a group of regional leaders from the business, labor, academic and non-profit sectors, believes there are three top priorities that must be addressed urgently:

- A much better customer experience

Domestic and international visitors using LAX contribute nearly \$9 billion to the L.A. economy; \$4 billion alone from international visitors. Roughly 60 million people walk through LAX's terminals each year, and we need to provide customers with a world-class arrival-and-departure experience - curbside to aircraft in every terminal. LAX's terminals provide a dismal first impression of Los Angeles and for some, the entire United States, with outdated restrooms, inferior restaurants and shops, confusing walkways, inade-

quate and outdated lounges, and no signage in multiple languages. Los Angeles is one of the world's top economic and cultural communities, and LAX should showcase its unique brands, attractions, theaters, businesses, restaurants, museums and landmarks, and how to get to them.

- Necessary improvements to increase safety and productivity, specifically moving the north runway

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Local businesses and our region's huge logistics industry need a fully modern LAX to interact rapidly and competitively with the global marketplace. On the north airfield, there needs to be greater separation between the two runways, and a center line taxiway needs to be built in between for optimal safety reasons and to increase productivity of the airport. As we saw with the April accident in New York, the A-380 and 747-8 require more space.

- Improving public transit connections, especially extending the Green Line

Extending the Green Line to LAX will allow travelers and employees of the airport to connect much more quickly and easily to the

Metropolitan Transportation Authority's growing transportation network and other destinations throughout the region. Public rail to LAX has been in discussion for more than 20 years and getting it done is overdue. The mayor's 30/10 proposal would provide the funds to expedite this extension (\$330 million is already committed to the estimated \$600 million price tag). Eventually, a traveler should be able to land at LAX, hop on a rail line and travel rapidly to downtown Los Angeles, the Westside, the San Fernando Valley and even on to Disneyland and Long Beach, without getting on the freeway.

Only with a truly world-class airport will Los Angeles maintain its rightful place as a truly world-class region that commands respect, attracts abundant trade and tourism, and fully meets the needs of citizens and businesses in Southern California.

The ability of Los Angeles to lead and to thrive in the 21st century global economy requires that these three additional priorities be embraced and executed promptly.

Russell Goldsmith, chairman and chief executive of City National Bank, is also chairman of the Los Angeles Coalition for the Economy and Jobs, a non-profit that helps develop and advance policies that produce long-term economic and job growth.

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