



COMMISSION

AGENDA MEMORANDUM

Item No.

7b

BRIEFING ITEM

Date of Meeting

July 28, 2020

DATE: July 21, 2020

TO: Stephen P. Metruck, Executive Director

FROM: Lance Lyttle, Aviation Division Managing Director

Julie Collins, Aviation Customer Experience

SUBJECT: FlyHealthy@SEA Briefing

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This briefing will provide an update on the health and safety actions in response to COVID-19 that have been implemented, and are under consideration, at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA). Since late April, SEA has been executing a multi-layered recovery plan, called FlyHealthy@SEA, involving collaboration with airport stakeholders to restore customer confidence in travel throughout the airport. Airport staff will also outline the work to explore implementation of an interim temperature check testing program at SEA as directed in the May 12th Port of Seattle Commission Motion (2020-11).

BACKGROUND

The unprecedented impacts of COVID-19 on the travel industry, and specifically in the aviation sector, are widely reported. The airport plays a vital role in the national and international travel ecosystem as well as serving as an essential hub of economic activity and job creation in our region. As a primary economic driver in Washington state, our highest priority is ensuring the health and safety for people at the airport.

Since hitting a 95% drop in passenger volume in April 2020 compared to April 2019, we are seeing a gradual return of travelers at SEA. For comparison, on July 16, 2020, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) measured a 73% drop in passenger volume through the security checkpoints compared to the same day in 2019. In April, we saw a low of 2,500 passengers per day travelling through the checkpoints and our current average is between 17,000 – 19,000 passengers per day, excluding passengers connecting in Seattle. We are heartened to see this improvement and the positive reactions many customers have had to the health and safety changes in the terminal. However, given the many medical uncertainties that remain around COVID-19 and the evolving health guidance, we are extremely sensitive to the many complexities involved in restoring confidence in air travel and the very lengthy recovery ahead.

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TERMINAL ACTIONS TO-DATE:

Significant changes have occurred throughout the terminal, based on health guidance from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), to improve the travel experience. These include:

- **Cleaning:** The immediate focus in response to COVID-19 was an enhanced emphasis on the cleaning of high-touch points throughout the terminal. This increased level of janitorial attention is ongoing. The airport also installed over 250 hand sanitizers throughout the airport and the locations are easily viewed on the SEA App. Additionally, the airlines have also been proactively installing hand sanitizers in their preferential spaces. We're currently testing new tools for air and surface sanitizing and collaborating with TSA for increased cleaning protocols at the security checkpoints.
- **Physical Distancing:** Over 3,000 signs, floor decals and seat stickers have been applied in the common areas around the airport to provide reminders for physical distancing. By the end of July, SEA will add an additional 4,000 physical distancing stickers to seats in the gate hold rooms. We've adjusted security screening queue lanes to create more space between passengers and seats have been removed in the food service areas to provide more distance. Also, SEA installed 180 plastic protective barriers in areas where there is close staff proximity to the public, such as at common use ticket counters, TSA podiums and information desks. Airlines are examining their use of additional plastic barriers throughout the terminal.
- **Facial Coverings:** Airport staff have implemented the requirement for facial coverings in all public areas of the terminal that went into effect on May 18th. The Port's facial coverings requirement has been further reinforced by subsequent actions from King County and Governor Jay Inslee. On July 1st, the airport launched a positive customer engagement campaign called "**Mask Up SEA**" to emphasize the facial covering requirement. We currently estimate the compliance level has improved to around 95%.
- **Communication:** From the earliest days of COVID-19, the Port's web site has been a go-to resource for health and airport information. This commitment continues with the utilization of all Port communication tools to help inform the travelling public including: a weekly FlyHealthy@SEA electronic newsletter, extensive media coverage, proactive and responsive social media, the SEA App, the Port's bi-weekly Connections electronic newsletter, blogs, paid advertising, and participating in forums such as one recently held by the Puget Sound Business Journal. In the terminal, we're conveying health and safety visual messages through: the flight information displays, ticket counter and kiosk monitors, and plentiful signage. Orally, we're providing information via overhead announcements (in multiple languages), through in-person assistance at the information desk and by telephone.

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HEALTH SAFETY SCREENINGS:

At the May 12th Commission meeting, a motion was approved directing staff to *“Develop a plan to facilitate temperature screenings for passengers departing through TSA checkpoints and those who have been cleared by U.S. Customs and Border Protection after an international arrival.”* The motion stated the need to collaborate with local and state public health officials. Airport staff have been working diligently to explore the implementation of an interim temperature check program at SEA. Here is the current status:

- **Context:** When the commission motion was approved in May, there were strong indications that a federal agency, such as TSA, would likely provide consistent national management of a long-term temperature check program. Since mid-May, not only have temperatures become a less consistent indicator of a positive COVID-19 diagnosis, but TSA has indicated it has no plans to assume this responsibility.
- **Temperature Check Testing:** A substantial focus for this work has been understanding how a temperature check program would work in the airport environment. We evaluated equipment options and, in addition to borrowing equipment from Paine Field, the Port purchased 2 telethermographic devices. In mid-June, we tested this equipment in the Federal Inspection Station (FIS) in the South Satellite with voluntary temperature checks for arriving international passengers. We learned about the sensitivities of the equipment and received positive customer feedback about the process. About 1400 passengers participated in these tests and no elevated temperatures were detected. On July 14th, we began a two-week “proof of concept” temperature check test in the main terminal at Checkpoint 5. This test, in cooperation with Alaska Airlines, is also voluntary and no personal information is collected. The tests run on weekdays from 9 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. with about 700 people tested each day. This “proof of concept” testing is vital to further test equipment efficiency, to measure passenger flow impacts, to understand staffing needs and to gauge passenger receptivity.
- **Health Partners:** The Port recognizes the necessity of health partnerships, particularly in taking action if a person has an elevated temperature, since this falls outside the Port’s authority. While airlines do have the authority to prohibit a person with an elevated temperature from flying, the airline industry is strongly on record in preferring a consistent, national system for health screenings and administered by a federal agency like the TSA. In discussions with the CDC around screenings for international passengers, the agency was clear they do not have resources to expand beyond their current targeted health screenings. The CDC declined direct participation in a mandatory program for all arriving international passengers. We have had collaborative discussions with the State Department of Health and the Seattle-King County Department of Health around the protocols involved with health screenings for domestic passengers. While neither health agency can provide the resources to help administer a temperature check

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program at SEA, there is interest at the state level around having temperature checks for airline passengers.

- **Staffing Costs:** Since the FAA policy prohibits airports from spending airport revenues on non-airport functions (and the agency informally asserted early in the pandemic that passenger health screenings are not an airport function), the Port intends that the funding for such an interim program will come from general purpose tax levy funds. Early estimates are that it will require 4-5 people per screening station (one at each of the five main terminal checkpoints and another in the FIS) to facilitate temperature check screenings for departing domestic passengers and arriving international passengers. The Port issued a Request For Proposals for a medical staffing company to perform these functions and staff is currently assessing the responses in order to estimate the costs for such a program. Since this is still an active procurement, staff cannot publicly discuss the details of the responses.

PROGRAM OPTIONS:

There are several options Port Commissioners may consider for advancing a health screening temperature check program at SEA. Given the various authority limitations around mandatory health screenings at U.S. airports, there are possible legal risks. Also, commissioners may wish to move staff's the staff's focus from health screenings for elevated temperatures to the potential of rapid COVID-19 tests. Here are three alternatives around temperature check screenings:

Alternative A: The Port conducts "random" temperature check screenings to serve as a deterrent for people travelling who have a temperature. Since the Port does not have the authority to prohibit even sick persons from boarding the aircraft, these screenings would be essentially informational in nature. Conduct the program through 2020. Assess the results and determine whether to extend into 2021.

Pro: -Provides a deterrent to sick travelers to come to the airport with a temperature
-Increases airport knowledge about testing protocols that could inform future federal health screening programs
-Potential for deterring a passenger with a temperature from flying

Con: -Cost impacts for tax levy
-Uncertainty around ongoing airline participation
-Lack of follow-up action if a passenger has an elevated temperature

This is not the preferred alternative.

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Alternative B: Move forward expeditiously to establish a mandatory health screening temperature check program at SEA for departing domestic passengers and arriving international passengers. Conduct the program through 2020. Assess the results and determine whether to extend into 2021.

Pro: -The first comprehensive temperature check program at a large hub U.S. airport
-SEA can share its lessons with other airports and the federal government in developing long-term health screening programs
-It may prevent a person with a temperature from traveling

Con: -Lack of commitment from health partners to participate
-Higher cost impacts for tax levy
-Potential for the federal government to require airports to assume an unfunded mandate
-Requires airline cooperation since Port cannot itself prevent a contagious passenger from travelling

This is not the preferred alternative.

Option C: Implement a second phase of “proof of concept” voluntary testing at each checkpoint. Accelerate plans for the screening of international arrival passengers. Assess the progress in November and determine next steps.

Pro: -Provides additional insights around the unique logistics for each checkpoint
-Provides time to refine staffing model and clearly understand the all-in costs for a full program
-Provides time to better understand the federal landscape and to advocate for a consistent, national program
-Positive passenger receptivity
-Provides time to work with airlines to develop a cooperative program for responses to passengers with elevated fevers

Con: -Cost impacts for tax levy
-Uncertainty around ongoing airline participation
-Lack of enforcement if a passenger has a temperature
-Cost/benefit of the program given the small number of temperatures detected
-International inbound screening is not increased beyond current levels

This is the recommended Alternative.

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NEXT STEPS:

- Airport staff will finalize an initial cost estimate range for staffing a temperature check program and other costs with general tax levy implications;
- Airport staff will be prepared to advance an action item at the August 11th Port Commission meeting to delegate authority to the Port’s Executive Director to enter into a contract with a medical staffing company;
- Airport staff will keep commissioners apprised of conversations in securing interest from potential health partners around some form of a temperature screening program at SEA;
- Airport staff will keep commissioners apprised of federal actions under consideration such as a second pandemic relief package and other legislative and agency developments;
- Airport staff will prepare for ongoing commission meeting presentations regarding future actions related to FlyHealthy@SEA, health and safety responses to COVID-19 and restoring confidence in air travel.

ATTACHMENTS TO THIS BRIEFING

Presentation Slides

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTIONS OR BRIEFINGS

May 12, 2020 – Port of Seattle Commission briefing on Airport Recovery (FlyHealthy@SEA)

May 12, 2020 – Commission Motion 2020-11 (A Motion to direct the Executive Director to develop and implement a plan for health screening of travelers at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, and to advocate for a national system of airport health screening.)

April 28, 2020 – Port of Seattle Commission briefing on Early Action Recovery Plan

April 28, 2020 – The Port Commission approved Motion 2020-09 (A Motion to authorize short-term changes to the 2020-2024 Capital Improvement Plan in response to the COVID-19 pandemic)

April 14, 2020 – Port of Seattle briefing on Federal CARES Act Update

April 1, 2020 – The Commission approved Motion 2020-06 (A Motion to provide guidance for Port leadership in prioritizing Port investments to assist local, regional, and statewide economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.)

April 1, 2020 – The Commission approved Motion 2020-07 (A Motion to provide immediate relief and support to Port employees and Port tenants and concessionaires.)