

The Future is Now

Nuria Fernandez, commissioner of aviation for the City of Chicago, on air travel in the 21st century.

NURIA FERNANDEZ OVERSEES THE management, planning, design, operation and maintenance of O'Hare and Midway International Airports. In 2005, more than 94 million passengers passed through the doors of Chicago's airports — 76.5 million at O'Hare and 17.8 million at Midway. The Chicago Airport System serves as landlord to 93 airlines, 140 business tenants and approximately 60,000 employees. Together, Chicago's airports generate more than \$45 billion in annual economic activity and 540,000 jobs for the region.

Global Traveler: What makes O'Hare and the Chicago system unique?

Nuria Fernandez: My goal is to make the Chicago Airport System a benchmark by which all other airports are measured. This means leading the aviation industry in safety, security and operations by setting standards that enhance our existing systems and establish trends that are followed by the rest of the aviation industry. We foster a belief in a passenger-focused model for doing business. Our vision is to make Chicago's airports "best in class" in the world.

We understand that Chicago's airports are only as good as the services they provide. In 2006, the Department of Aviation launched a series of initiatives aimed at enhancing the traveling experience. A few examples:

- The first of nine multilingual, touch-screen "Virtual Concierge" work stations was installed in the baggage claim area of O'Hare's Terminal 3. The kiosk provides hotel, transportation and airport information in eight languages, including flight status and weather updates. The kiosk also provides information about events and attractions. Once users have identified a specific venue, location or service, they can touch the screen to dial the telephone number and pick up the receiver for a direct, free-of-charge connection.
- In June, the Department of Aviation

announced the opening of cell phone parking lots at O'Hare and Midway where motorists can temporarily park free of charge while awaiting arriving passengers. These lots eliminate the need for circling the airport repeatedly, ultimately resulting in less traffic and congestion, less air pollution and increased auto fuel savings.

- We recently announced a new baggage handling and check-in service located in Economy Parking Lot E at O'Hare. For a \$5 fee, domestic travelers can check their bags, receive their boarding pass and seat assignment, board the Airport Transit System to the terminals and proceed directly to their gate.
- In December, we launched an

automated mail system at six security checkpoints at O'Hare. The Mail Safe Express system provides travelers with another option to keep their personal items [rejected by security] by choosing to mail them home securely via the U.S. Postal Service or UPS.

GT: Tell us about the expansion plan at O'Hare.

NF: In 2005, the City of Chicago broke ground on the O'Hare Modernization Program. The program [involves] a new configuration of the airfield that will ensure that we continue to serve millions of passengers and businesses, and ship millions of tons of cargo with efficiency and reduced delay. ■■

