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\$35 Million LVIA Expansion To Speed Up Security Check-In

The Lehigh Valley International Airport's new \$35 million expansion project will go live by the end of August, nearly doubling the number of passengers that can get through security during peak times.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro and U.S. Rep. Susan Wild, on July 28, helped cut a ceremonial ribbon to the 40,000-square-foot project that expands an airport that now handles roughly 1 million passengers and 118 tons of freight each year.

The project was among thousands being funded by the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, but it is the first to be completed, Buttigieg said.

“I know how important this project and this airport are for this entire Lehigh Valley,” Buttigieg said. “It’s also a very special project for me because we have now announced about 37,000 projects that benefit from funding from the infrastructure law ... but this is the very first one that I’ve been able to be at where we are celebrating the completion of a project. You delivered this on task, on time and on budget. We’re looking for more of that.”

Other stakeholders on hand to celebrate the airport expansion included LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley, Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce CEO Tony Iannelli, Lehigh County Executive Phillips Armstrong, Northampton County Executive Lamont McClure, Allentown Mayor Matt Tuerk and Bethlehem Mayor J. William Reynolds and Easton Mayor Sal Panto.

In addition to \$15 million in Lehigh-Northampton Airport Authority money, project funding included \$5.6 million in federal and \$13 million in state money. The Lehigh Valley’s place as one of Pennsylvania’s fastest-growing regions was not lost on Gov. Shapiro.

“This expansion should send a clear message that Allentown and the Lehigh Valley are ready to drive innovation and economic opportunity on a national and global scale,” Shapiro said. “Our Commonwealth was a major supporter of this project, investing nearly \$13 million in this expansion. We are going to support your continued growth and help the Lehigh Valley compete, not just across the nation but around the world – and this new terminal will be the gateway to that progress.”

Rep. Wild echoed the governor’s belief in the Lehigh Valley’s future.

“This is an investment in our community and an investment in our country – and so what we are going to be able to do by expanding ABE [Transportation Security Administration] TSA screening capabilities and overall capacity, we’re growing transportation across Allentown, Bethlehem, Easton and beyond, which is going to pay dividends for our status as a continually growing economic hub on the Eastern Seaboard,” Wild said. “Our state partners, the Governor, our state representatives, the state legislature, and PennDOT understand that investments in transportation infrastructure like ABE mean economic growth in communities like ours.”

The project will help the airport retire the narrow, underground tunnel “bottleneck“ it’s been using to check in passengers since 1974. It will include better message boards to direct passengers and makes LVIA the first airport in the world to install medical-grade air purification from Upper Macungie-based LifeAire Systems.

But the benefit air travelers will notice most is its ability to get people through security faster and easier. Rather than navigating three escalators, people will now need just one and the new airport screening lanes will increase the number of people who can get through security from 400 per hour to 700. It will also separate the flow of departing passengers from those arriving. The added efficiency is most needed in the early morning hours when several flights are boarding at the same time.

“Make no mistake, this project wasn’t just a ‘nice to have’ addition for our airport,” said LVIA Executive Director Tom Stoudt. “It was critical infrastructure that was needed to not only continue to serve our current demand, but to serve our growing region.”

The project also takes advantage of the latest in energy efficiency, enabling the airport to pursue Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold certification, Stoudt said. That includes saving about 57,000 gallons of water a year, an expected 27% energy savings and the installation of 10 charging stations for charging electric vehicles near the building entrance.

Airport expansion will not end with the new passenger security area. LVIA is considering ways to expand its outdoor area for cargo planes. With FedEx and Amazon planes making daily flights in and out of LVIA, the airport handled 118 tons of freight cargo in 2022. By the close of May, it was more than 30% ahead of last year’s record pace.

Before leaving the Lehigh Valley, Buttigieg had private meetings with local leaders to discuss regional issues. That included meeting with the LVPC’s Bradley to discuss regional transportation needs.