

Expanded terminal 5 opens at O'Hare Int'l airport

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Chicago's O'Hare International Airport's Terminal 5 now has more space to accommodate planes and passengers after 10 new gates opened for airlines' use.

The new gates entering service mark the completion of a key piece of the revamp of the former international terminal, which has been under construction about four years. Additional work remains underway at the terminal and other major work is planned as part of a broader overhaul of the airport, including eventually tearing down Terminal 2 and replacing it with a new Global Terminal and two satellite concourses.

The \$1.3 billion renovation of Terminal 5, designed by firms HOK and Muller & Muller Ltd., was set to expand the terminal by 350,000 square feet, add passenger amenities and security checkpoint lanes, reconfigure customs facilities and replace an aging baggage handling system.

The terminal now serves both domestic and international flights. And, in October, Delta Air Lines moved into 10 renovated gates and opened a new lounge in Terminal 5, vacating its former space in Terminal 2.

“By providing jobs and contracting opportunities, as well as acting as a catalyst for roadway and other infrastructure improvements, our airports have become

essential to the economic health of our region,” Mayor Lori Lightfoot said during a Tuesday event celebrating the opening of the terminal extension. “And further, our airports continue to serve as gateways to Chicago for domestic and international travelers.”

The new gates are expected to handle about 120 arrivals or departures a day and up to 18,000 additional daily passengers, according to the Chicago Department of Aviation. That will bring the total number of flights at Terminal 5 to about 440 arrivals and departures each day.

Nine of the 10 new gates use a flexible system that can accommodate both large wide-body planes and smaller narrow-body aircraft, meaning the space needed to park two large planes can also be repurposed to fit three narrow-body planes, the city said.

The new gates opened in phases between June 2022 and January. They are not assigned to an individual airline, and could be used by any carrier that operates out of the terminal.

Terminal 5 opened to serve international flights in 1993 at a cost of \$618 million, Department of Aviation Commissioner Jamie Rhee said during the Tuesday event. It replaced an interim international terminal created in the mid-1980s, known as Terminal 4.

It was initially designed to accommodate 61 million passengers flying to 30 international destinations, Rhee said. By 2019, the terminal was handling 83 million passengers traveling to 73 locations, she said.

The pandemic hit air travel hard in 2020, but it also allowed construction on Terminal 5 to progress quickly as airlines’ demand to use gates dropped, Rhee said.

Some work remains at the terminal. New concessions are expected to open in phases throughout 2023, and a six-story parking garage is to be finished in 2024.

The new baggage handling system is expected to be finished later this year, as are more upgrades to the customs and immigration area.

About \$3.5 million worth of art from Chicago artists, commissioned by the city’s Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, will be installed near baggage claim, the customs and immigrations arrival area, and the concourse level.

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