

BDL in the News:



Teardown Of Terminal B At Bradley Airport Begins Renovation Effort

By ZACH MELVIN | Published July 20, 2015

Almost a year after the Connecticut Airport Authority awarded the demolition contract, the walls of Terminal B at Bradley International Airport — the old Murphy Terminal — are finally starting to come down.

In August, the newly formed authority awarded S&R Corp. an \$18 million contract to level the terminal to make way for a new "transportation center" for rental car agencies and bus transfers.

To a traveler seeing the old hulk at the airport, it might not look like much progress has been made, but the airport authority's executive director Kevin A. Dillon said there has been a flurry behind the scenes.

"There was a lot of environmental remediation that had to take place up front," he said. "There's been a lot of work occurring inside the structure that people on the outside haven't seen as part of the demolition."

The demolition is the first major bricks-and-mortar project the authority has undertaken since its spinoff from the state Department of Transportation in 2011. The authority is hoping the terminal will be gone by the end of January so it can start work on a new home for its rental car facilities.

"People saw it as somewhat symbolic, that it was emblematic of the deterioration of the aviation market here in Connecticut," Dillon said. "We'd like to get the building down, put on the new face of Bradley."

But it's not just about wiping out the decrepit building.

"First and foremost, it's a customer service improvement," Dillon said. "It consolidates all of the rental car facilities that today are scattered in and around the airport."

The terminal, built in 1952, contained high amounts of asbestos and other contaminants that required removal.

"It was just a week or so ago that we started to actually take down the concourses," Dillon said this month. "There'll still be some remediation going on in the main part of the building that people see from the roadway, but I would expect within the next month, people will start to see that come down as well."

The airport stopped using the former Murphy Terminal in 2010, but the site had served as office space for the Transportation Security Administration and State Police. Those agencies have since relocated.

Dillon said the airport authority is hoping to start construction on the facility in 2017. Once the site is cleared, significant roadway realignments are necessary to enable construction on additional projects. Estimates place the cost for roadwork at about \$10 million, and the authority hopes it can start working on plans next year when the terminal is gone.

If current projections hold, the new building will cost about \$250 million. Money will come from a fee travelers pay when they rent a car from the airport. The airport authority is just now starting to look into the design process.

The demolition will leave room for future terminal space, too, though Dillon said estimates don't see a need for more gates until around 2025. The airport made news in 2012 for its rather optimistic growth projections, suggesting an 81 percent increase in passenger

traffic by 2028. Meanwhile, a separate study from the Federal Aviation Administration forecast just a 23 percent increase in traffic over the same time frame.

Dillon said the transportation center is a part of a long-term plan to integrate Bradley into the surrounding transportation infrastructure.

As the airport looks to add more routes and longer flights, Dillon said integration with surface transportation is vital.

Growth was strong in 2014. Enplanements and deplanements climbed to 5.9 million, 8.4 percent higher than in 2013. However, traffic is still well below its 2005 peak of 7.4 million, and Bradley still lacks the amenities that other medium-sized airports have in the region.

"As we look to develop international service here, a lot of international travelers are looking for that airport to rail connectivity," he said. "T.F. Green [in Warwick, R.I.] can provide day trip access into Boston. We want to be able to do the same thing here, in terms of enhancing the rail service, to be able to connect into rail services going down to New York, for example."

A planned commuter train between New Haven and Springfield is crucial to that goal. The line would stop at the Windsor Locks Amtrak Station 6 miles from the airport, and the authority would run a shuttle to the Windsor Locks station.

"By that, I mean probably a bus meeting every train going back and forth and being processed through this transportation center," Dillon said. "As soon as the DOT brings the trains there, we're ready to go with the bus service."

For now, Dillon said the authority is hoping to make better use of existing services. The authority is in talks with the DOT and CT Transit to enhance the Bradley Flyer route, which connects the airport to downtown Hartford.

Fare for a one-way trip on the Flyer is \$1.50, and the bus makes 12 stops in the capital before heading up to Bradley. The Flyer has about 500 boardings to and from the airport each day.

"There is nothing more convenient and inexpensive and as reliable as the Bradley Flyer," said regular Flyer rider Suzanne Hopgood, a Hartford resident who is chairwoman of the Capital Region Development Authority.

"There's quite a few people who don't know the service exists," said Randal Davis, special assistant to the commissioner of the DOT. "We met with [the airport authority] recently in reference to the different signage that they will be putting up."

And the authority wants to add a similar, low-cost bus service to and from Springfield, Dillon said — which could happen, Davis added, "if there is a demand."

The Flyer was initially established to provide business travelers with a trip to their offices in the city. Business travel is something Bradley does well, Dillon said, and it makes for a good marketing tool when courting airlines for additional routes.

"The mainstay of any airline route is typically business travel," he said.

At airports of similar size, Dillon said business traffic makes up about 35 percent of total passengers. At Bradley, it's split almost evenly between business and leisure.

"We really have to demonstrate to the airlines the strength of the business community here to try and get routes like the one we just got to Houston," he said, referring to the United Airlines route between Bradley and George Bush Intercontinental Airport that began flying in October.