



Sky bridge check-in kiosks at Sea-Tac save time, money

By BRAD WONG – P-I REPORTER

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Steve Van Slyke was rushing to his flight at Sea-Tac Airport on Thursday when he passed a sky bridge and what looked like a blue ATM.

Soon, though, the 49-year-old Redmond resident was tapping the screen to get his boarding pass. "It's cool," he said. "I had to take a double take. It's better than waiting in line."

Since Tuesday, passengers departing from Sea-Tac have been able to check in for flights at sky bridge kiosks, which are part of a pilot program designed to save time and money. Passengers flying on Alaska Airlines, Horizon Air, Northwest Airlines and Continental Airlines can use seven machines on the airport's fourth floor near the parking lot. In the coming weeks, United Airlines passengers also will be able to use them.

"You have your boarding pass in hand, and if you don't have luggage (to check), you go straight to the gate," airport spokesman Perry Cooper said. Passengers with luggage can drop their bags off at ticket counters. "You're going to cut your transaction time at the counter in half," Cooper said.

The IBM-built machines can read credit cards and passports to identify passengers, he added. They use wireless technology to send information to carriers. They also have firewalls for protection, he said, and do not save personal information.

Sea-Tac is the 10th U.S. airport to use the kiosks, according to the International Air Transport Association. Already, they are being used in Europe and Canada, including in Vancouver.

In a way, the machines enable the airport to expand without adding buildings, Cooper said. One study, he said, says carriers can save about \$3 for each passenger who uses a kiosk to get a boarding pass. The participating carriers are giving \$600,000 to support the Sea-Tac program, which will last up to 12 months.

Airport officials are thinking about installing the kiosks in downtown Seattle hotels, cruise terminals, light rail stations and the Washington State Convention and Trade Center. Officials note that they are designed to complement self-check-in counters used by carriers such as Alaska and Southwest Airlines.

Orange-and-blue balloons now festoon the kiosks and attached signs read, "Quick Check-In." On Thursday afternoon, passengers strolled by several of them. Some said they checked in using their personal computers at home.

Martha Taber, 57, stopped to try one of the kiosks. She and her mother visited the Puget Sound area for a vacation and were returning to Sacramento, Calif. Taber entered her name on the screen, watched her passes drop into a slot and closely inspected them. "This was convenient. But you would have to know about computers," she said.

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