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San Antonio Board of REALTORS®

REAL ESTATE
PODCAST

Gilbert ([00:00](#)):

Howdy everyone and welcome to this episode 36 of our Get Real podcast. Our guest today is Tim O'Krongley Aviation Deputy Director for the San Antonio International Airport. Tim has more than 34 years of experience in the aviation industry and previously served as Deputy aviation Director for the city of San Antonio. Last year he was appointed to his most recent position on the airport's leadership team. Tim, thank you for joining us today.

Tim ([00:26](#)):

Thank you very much. Appreciate you having me today.

Gilbert ([00:29](#)):

our goal is, everyone's been talking about this 2.5 billion expansion to our airport, which I think most people would say are extremely excited about, and we just wanted to know a little bit about what's included in that plan. If you were gonna summarize it, just an overview of what people can expect over the coming years, how would you do that?

Tim ([00:50](#)):

Well, it is an exciting program and that 2.5 billion is the whole program. So the terminal and all the enabling projects and even some airfield projects make up that total number. But kind of the highlights really the ones that are the most forward-facing, if you will, is up to a 17 gate new terminal facility and where that's located, if you're standing in front of the terminals and you have terminal A to your right, you know where you southwest is and terminal B would be right in front of you where American is, if you look to that open space, we had pre-planned for that when we built terminal B. So that's where the new terminal will be in that kind of open space to the left. And besides being up to 17 gates, it will offer the newer design. when Terminal A was built in, it was really built in 1984 is when it opened it as designed in the late seventies.

Tim ([01:40](#)):

It was really a whole different passenger mix and fleet mix than we have today. Much smaller planes, which meant you need smaller gate holds and less concessions. All that's changed today and you see

that more modern facilities, you have more space, more concessions, more retail options. That's what this project is gonna bring to San Antonio, specifically to the terminal. And it's really exciting. It's also gonna give a really authentic sense of place and we're gonna do that several ways and I can tell you a little bit more about that later. There are some other enabling projects besides the terminal that will help as well. we've got some roadway improvements that will help if you've come here sometimes in the evening, the congestion on the front of the curb is there. We're gonna eliminate that. We're gonna build some additional parking. We're gonna build something called a ground transportation center where you can go in one facility and pick up the Uber, Lyft, taxis VIA. And so all of those combined will really enhance the customer experience for the users of San Antonio International Airport.

Gilbert ([02:43](#)):

So 17 gates is, what does that compare to now? So what is the total gates for A and B currently or individually?

Tim ([02:51](#)):

So we just added some gates and because we're at capacity, so we have a total of it in terminal A. We have 16 gates and then we have eight gates in terminal B. When we add this new terminal, a couple of those gates will go away because of the way it will connect to it. But ultimately we will look at the terminal a since it's the oldest facility and if we build up to 17 gates at the new facility, then at some point we will reduce the number of gates in terminal A don't know that number yet. That's kind of a little bit future planning exercise, but we'll make sure it's right size. But we are growing the gates are in demand. Kind of another interim step that we are building. I just went to counsel something called a ground load facility. And what that is a lot of airports, you'll see it in California all the way to Florida, where certain aircraft like to ground load. In other words, you actually use stairs instead of a jet bridge to board the aircraft. We're trying to make San Antonio accommodating to all users. Some air some airlines really like that. And so this is another interim step to accommodate the growth and that just went to city council and that should be ready here in a couple years.

Gilbert ([04:15](#)):

So, I mean, we are truly increasing the capacity of the airport by adding 17 gates which isn't far from what we currently have. So ground loading, is that something that travelers appreciate or want to do, or is that just in case the capacity continues to grow?

Tim ([04:34](#)):

No, that's actually very targeted toward airlines that like that model. And by having a different model, we offer the full array from your legacy carriers that don't use that model to some of the new ultra low cost carriers that do that like that model. Cuz they're efficient if you're like the Long Beach, for example, Denver building some, it's really to accommodate that full range of passengers and passenger experience. So we're building it to not only increase capacity and we'll determine how many gates in terminal A eventually come down, but certainly this is to add capacity for our demand.

Gilbert ([05:12](#)):

So it's the plan what that we're hearing about now. My guess is it's been under works for a while, so how would you say the part, where are we in that process at this point in time?

Tim ([05:25](#)):

Sure. I'll kind of walk you through how we got where we are today. So it starts with what's called a master plan or a strategic plan. You probably saw those efforts really from about 2019 to about 2021. And the airports do that every five to 10 years depending on their look. But it's really to sit and say, okay, what do we have of us as a facility? What do we need? And kind of what's that gap in between? So that's your master plan or business plan, if you will. We finished that in November, 2021, and then we wanted to go to the next step, which was called the Advanced Terminal Planning document. So we took the concept of the terminal, which was identified in that master plan document and needed to flush it out a little bit more. We just finished that. And so the next step then is actually to go from planning, which is where we just finished to actual design and construction. That's where we are today and that's where we will be. The new terminal is expected to open second quarter of 2028.

Gilbert ([06:24](#)):

So the design and construction, has the design been finalized or is that still out for bidding or discussion?

Tim ([06:32](#)):

So we have, we're gonna procure it through a method called *seam at risk*. And we have the designer on board and here soon we will go out for the contractor. We're at about 10 to 15% design right now. And that particular method that we picked, we did intentionally because it gives us a lot of control over that sense of place or that design the aesthetics of the building, and we think it's really the best method for us. So to answer your question a little more directly, we're just at the beginning of stages of design.

Gilbert ([07:05](#)):

So when you say sense of place I kind of want to ask what are you hearing most people want it to look like? Or is it gonna look just like A and B, is it gonna completely take a different feeling and vibe or is it about how you travel through the process of checking in luggage and all the other stuff?

Tim ([07:24](#)):

It's all of that. And, and yeah, it's an exciting question because when we did the strategic master plan part of it, we had over a hundred thousand touches with the community, whether it was public meetings or surveys or something like that. And we really understood what people were looking for. But San Antonio is so unique that how do you define San Antonio? There's so many different ways to define it. It in one sense, it gives us a whole broad range of things to do. And in another sense we have to figure out, okay, what do we pick unlike maybe other cities like Nashville, which is really kinda easy. It's known for music, you can go with that theme. So our design team, I thought came up with some really good kind of sense of place things.

Tim ([08:05](#)):

And one thing I think that all of San Antonio and the region can identify with that makes us unique is our outdoors trees, water whether it's the Riverwalk or, or the parks and, and things like that. So we're designing that sense of place from when you first enter the campus. They're off of four 10 all the way to when you get on your airplane. And let me explain a little bit more how we're gonna do that. So a lot of it will be landscaping, but we're doing things like from the garages you'll go across bridges. Well, San Antonio's got a very unique history with bridge design if you look at the river walk and the parks. So we want to incorporate that, what we really want, since this is the first place you enter San Antonio and the last place you leave, we want them to really understand what is San Antonio, what's the region?

Tim ([08:53](#)):

One of the more exciting pieces of this is what we call the Paseo, typically in a terminal the roadway abuts to the building. So you pull your car up and you get out and you walk straight in the building. Well, what we're going to build is there's gonna be figure this area between the roadway and the start of the building, and there'll probably, I don't know the exact dimension, let's just say 60 feet, where it's gonna be a Paseo and it looks like kind of a, a dry creek bed if you will, or have trees and, and you know water features and stuff like that that brings you back to the region with our rivers, the river wall, kind of that sense of place that then will be carried into the terminal building. And we're gonna have a courtyard, an open air courtyard when you go past security.

Tim ([09:38](#)):

So once you pass security, you'll not only have more spacious gate holds, so you'll have the ability to go outside and all the fun, fun things we can do with that, with concessions and time of year. like Oktoberfest, you could have something out there Fiesta. It's just really gonna be unique. But all that carries that sense of place of who we are in the region. And, and it's really, it's something I think everyone can identify. And then a little bit more to your point. So you bring that in with the materials the color schemes the amenities that you offer to the, in the, in the concessions and those themes. And it all kind of culminates in one big package, which will say San Antonio make us unique.

Gilbert ([10:20](#)):

it sounds like something most travelers haven't seen before. I, I don't know if I've heard of an airport described with an outside area, this is gonna be pretty unique design then for in comparison to other major airports.

Tim ([10:37](#)):

It is there, there's a couple airports that are starting to do that mm-hmm. <Affirmative>. but I think ours are, it is gonna be really unique and when done right, it will be very reflective of when they go and they we have passengers or, or the citizens of San Antonio. It'll be really reminiscent of what they'll see and experience in the community. And that's what we were looking for.

Gilbert ([11:00](#)):

we always want San Antonio to be the best. And it sounds like it's headed that way with the airport. Is there, if you know as one of the largest cities in the country, it feels like we're going to be adding the capacity that we've needed. Is this gonna compare to other airports for the other major metropolitan areas around the country?

Tim ([11:21](#)):

Well, we're in, so the airports are divided in, in a according to how many passengers they process. And so there's non hub, medium hubs, small hubs and large hubs. DFW obviously is like a large hub. Houston, internet Continental is a large hub, so we're a medium hub, but we're getting close to becoming a large hub at some point. So we kind of fit in that range with the passengers. But certainly everything that we build, we know that you don't build these facilities often. So we will build it with the forecasts in mind that we'll be able to grow into the facility and and expand as we need to. So it will definitely be in par with, with our peer airports.

Gilbert ([12:03](#)):

The strategy for this airport, is this incorporating more opportunities for jobs in San Antonio?

Tim ([12:12](#)):

Absolutely, especially when you look at the more immediate, the construction and what will happen with that. That's very much, we hire contractors and they'll want to use the local community. But even beyond that, as we add concession space and as new airlines or current airlines grow or other tenants, it's it's not just a terminal. We have a, almost a whole city out here on the airport. We have companies that do aircraft interiors. We have mechanics, we have all kinds of different jobs that are associated with aviation on the airfield. And the more we grow that and offer opportunities, whether it's a terminal directly or other facilities that we bring in here to locate with the airport or support those, those are all really good jobs for the San Antonio area. And San Antonio has such a, an amazing and rich history with aviation. the first military flight was happened in San Antonio all the way through today. That we just want to keep fostering that and offering that economic incentive the airport itself it's a couple years old, but it we're a 5 billion infusion to the local economy.

Gilbert ([13:21](#)):

I think most people are excited that this is happening and curious on how you think that this will help with the number of flights that we get. I think sometimes travelers or sometimes economic decisions are made on, well, those flights. It's not easy to fly in and out of that city and therefore moving our headquarters there. Do you think that this is going to help us with our economic development efforts because this airport is going to bring us more of those types of opportunities for business travel?

Tim ([13:54](#)):

Absolutely. And it, it is all kind of a big puzzle piece, if you will, but certainly the better facilities we have, the more facilities that we can attract airlines, it's kind of a culmination of everything. I don't know if you can really point to one thing or another, but we work with our airlines closely. They're business partners and we certainly want them to grow here and bring more flights, whether it's more nonstops or increase what they have or new airlines. but they also face business decisions. the aviation industry particularly right now is a shortage of pilots and equipment. So making the business case making economically valuable, forum 'em, offering the facilities that's all part of the puzzle that we work with daily. We have a whole team that is constantly trying to get new air service or enhance air service. We have, we have marketing we're own, we're our own little city out here, kind of we have our own fire police and everything. So it's what we do all day long to try to increase the offerings and amenities for the city and the citizens.

Gilbert ([14:57](#)):

I think I'm super excited about what this is gonna do for San Antonio, and I wanna kind of start wrapping us up by asking what's this gonna do for my family vacation? How is this going to affect any, is there going to be any disruption of current travel?

Tim ([15:14](#)):

Well, we're gonna try to minimize that. So if I say no, I, I can't say it with with an honest thing, <laugh>, but there will be, but we will definitely try to minimize that. The good thing about this project is that the terminal itself was plan for that area. So from, from like a contracting standpoint, it's not on the airport or secure side. So inside the terminal would be very little minimal impact, where you're gonna see most of the impact is gonna be on the roadway when we start doing those roadway improvements. But again

we're, we're very conscious about how we can do that and how do we minimize it and understanding that there's a high demand right now for parking. So that is one of the first things that we've tasked the team to do is how do we identify those, those inconveniences at risks and how do we mitigate those? So we have a very active program to try to minimize that as much as we can because we realize it, it, coming to the airport sometimes can be a little stressful. you're trying to make a fight. If someone changes something that you've normally done, you've always parked here. Now it's changed a little bit. That just adds to the stress. We don't want that for our passengers. We want this to be a pleasant experience now during construction and after construction.

Gilbert ([16:28](#)):

And the final cutting of the ribbon will be in 2028? Yes. Okay. All right. Well we're looking forward to it. And with that, that's gonna wrap up our podcast. Tim, I really want to thank you for joining us and sharing a little bit of the information on what's to come to make our international airport so much better.

Tim ([16:46](#)):

Well, thank you very much.

Gilbert ([16:48](#)):

And thank you everyone for listening to get real.