

Changing Perceptions: LAWA's Plan for LAX

COMMITTEE REPORT



Roger A. Johnson, Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA) Deputy Executive Director, Photos © John Livzey, 2015

Perception can be a powerful tool. The “good old days” may never have existed and things might not be as bad as they seem right now. Convincing people otherwise, though, can be a difficult task. But that is exactly what Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA) Deputy Executive Director Roger A. Johnson did at a packed WTS-LA luncheon on July 9 when he revealed advancements LAWA is making at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX).

“That used to be us.” A phrase President Obama used to contrast how countries like China and Singapore now have better rail systems and airports than the United States. The phrase is also the title of a Thomas Friedman book on the subject, a book that laments how the US lags behind other countries in infrastructure funding and development. Johnson used the phrase and references to the book to great effect in his presentation. Though acknowledging that America has the resources, skills, and experience to make a “comeback,” Johnson described the current state of US infrastructure as “half-time in America and we have not finished very well.” But there is hope. Johnson quoted as key Friedman’s solution for “the need to stimulate job growth through targeted investments that upgrade U.S. infrastructure.” Enter LAX.

Though Friedman is less than kind to airport infrastructure in his book, Johnson presented powerful evidence of LAX’s vitality and indispensable role as an economic engine for the region. In a PowerPoint presentation, Johnson noted that, with 70.5 million passengers, LAX is the second busiest airport in the U.S. and the fifth busiest in the world. It’s *the* busiest origin/destination airport in the world. In 2011, LAWA supported nearly 300,000 jobs, labor income of \$13.6 billion, and economic output of \$39.7 billion. In 2015, its capital budget will grow to \$8.5 billion. LAX is a force, and Johnson demonstrated this convincingly. But he didn’t stop there.

Johnson next discussed Singapore’s Changi Airport, often regarded as the world’s best. He explained that Changi officials are in the process of planning and designing a new terminal. As part of



that planning and to generate new ideas, they have sent *four* delegations to LAX to tour the new Tom Bradley International Terminal. But the Tom Bradley Terminal is not the only attraction at LAX.

Described by Johnson as “one of the most game-changing projects underway at LAX,” the Automated People Mover (APM) will allow visitors to access LAX via Metro Rail—a long-held hope in Los Angeles—and facilitate a new “CONRAC,” a consolidated rental car facility. According to 2011 statistics, 17% of passengers originating from LAX used a rental car. Johnson believes the APM and CONRAC will greatly reduce traffic congestion at LAX. But those are not the only benefits he expects.



Westchester, the community that surrounds LAX, has endorsed a master land-use plan that will create a buffer zone with jobs and economic development along the northern boundary of the airport. Though construction will cause temporary inconvenience, the end result will prove nothing short of phenomenal for both the airport and the Westchester community.

Perception can be a powerful tool. But reality trumps it. At the WTS-LA July 9 luncheon LAWA Deputy Executive Director Roger A. Johnson trumped perception with the reality of LAWA’s LAX plan that is creating jobs, stimulating the local economy, and repositioning LAX and the region for continued economic prosperity.