

Abu Dhabi Airports CEO: Midfield Terminal is almost complete; set to feature shopping mall



Bryan Thompson, CEO, Abu Dhabi Airports, delivers a presentation on the Midfield Terminal Building during FTE-APEX Asia EXPO 2019 in Singapore

Abu Dhabi International Airport's US\$3 billion Midfield Terminal Building is almost complete with operational readiness trials well under way, according to Bryan Thompson, CEO, Abu Dhabi Airports.

"Once the Midfield Terminal opens, it will be a stunning destination airport in its own right and a unique selling point for airlines considering us for future operations," said Thompson, who delivered a presentation on the Midfield Terminal Building development during FTE-APEX Asia EXPO 2019, which took place on November 12-13 in Singapore.

"I can say we are in what I like to call the last mile in delivering the Midfield Terminal," he said. "If you look at Abu Dhabi's accomplishments in recent years - the Louvre, the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, Ferrari World - these are world-class attractions. The new terminal, one of the region's largest airport infrastructure projects, will be in the same league. Quite simply, we are redefining travel and reinforcing Abu Dhabi's position as a global hub for business and leisure travel."

The new terminal is designed to handle over 8,500 people per hour and will increase the airport's capacity by up to 45 million passengers per year. To deliver this throughput, the facility will include 65 contact and 14 remote stands, 49 gates, 106 boarding bridges, 154 check-in counters, 44 self-check-in counters, and 10 baggage reclaims, with the baggage handling system processing almost 500,000 bags daily.

Explaining the "seamless travel experience" which permeates both the new building, and the airport, Thompson said: "We are constantly introducing new facilities and enhancing our infrastructure to provide the highest standard of operational efficiency for our passenger and airline customers." This includes US Customs and Border Control Pre-clearance facilities for Etihad passengers, and a smart travel system including self-check-in, self-bag drop, e-registration, e-border gates, and self-boarding facilities.

He emphasized that the experience would be the same for all travelers, regardless of who they are

flying with.

Thompson noted that the importance of commercial and retail revenues at Abu Dhabi differed from other airports: “We are more dependent on non-aeronautical revenue than aeronautical. We have deliberately chosen that model specifically to ensure we are as attractive a destination as possible for airlines – and, by extension, a first-class airport for passengers, of all classes – throughout the UAE.”

The Midfield Terminal will feature an array of retail and food and beverage offerings, spread across 23,000 square meters. “That puts it in the same league as some of the malls we see in the region – and we believe is a key factor in persuading residents in all emirates to see Abu Dhabi as a viable first choice of airport; not just those living in the capital.”

Looking ahead, he said the priority was to begin operations in the new Midfield Terminal Building. “When that’s done, we can leverage everything Abu Dhabi has to offer to demonstrate to the world that this is the must-visit Middle East destination, and the new hub of choice for travelers looking at breaking up their long-haul flights.”

Speaking about the airport’s current performance, he said: “We are on track for a great year,” he said. “Obviously, as a hub airport for Etihad, we have seen changes with the airline’s restructuring and review of its priorities, but that restructuring is really bearing fruit. Working load factors at Etihad are now among the highest in the region – they are flying full aircraft, which is great for sustainability and a sure sign of how strong Etihad’s reputation is with flyers.”

The airport also welcomed its first low-cost carrier in October, when Abu Dhabi’s Etihad Aviation Group and Sharjah-based Air Arabia announced the launch of Air Arabia Abu Dhabi. The UAE capital’s first low-cost carrier will cater to the growing budget travel market, while strengthening connectivity at the airport.

The new airline will greatly expand choice and further establish Abu Dhabi as a next-generation hub, said Thompson.

Abu Dhabi International Airport handled 22.3 million passengers in 2018.