

# Houston readies its airports for World Cup transformation



Houston Airports Director of Aviation joins Houston Mayor John Whitmire, Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo and other community leaders in celebrating 500 days until Houston hosts the world's biggest soccer tournament.

As the countdown to FIFA World Cup 2026 reaches 500 days, Houston Airports is accelerating an ambitious transformation of its aviation infrastructure. The initiative encompasses both George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH) and William P. Hobby Airport (HOU), preparing to build on the system's record-breaking passenger numbers of 63.1 million in 2024.

## **Strategic gateway**

"Holding seven World Cup matches in Houston is a game-changer for our city's global profile," says Jim Szczesniak, director of aviation for Houston Airports. "As the first and last impression for millions of visitors, Bush and Hobby airports are investing in enhanced facilities, cutting-edge technology and seamless connectivity to create an unforgettable experience for travelers."

The transformation program targets multiple aspects of the passenger experience, with particular emphasis on international travel capacity. A cornerstone of these preparations is the new International Central Processor (ICP) at IAH, scheduled to open before the tournament. This facility will streamline international arrivals and departures through advanced technology integration,

enhanced security screening and accelerated baggage handling.

### **Passenger experience**

The airports' comprehensive upgrade strategy extends beyond basic infrastructure. A US\$30 million investment is dedicated to modernizing restroom facilities across both airports, incorporating advanced technology such as occupancy sensors and smart dispensers while expanding stall sizes to accommodate modern traveler needs.

The program also emphasizes customer service enhancement through specialized training programs focused on language support and cultural sensitivity. This initiative aims to ensure seamless assistance for the diverse international audience expected during the tournament.

### **Sustainable operations**

Environmental considerations play a crucial role in the renovation strategy. The airports are investing in eco-friendly ground service equipment and implementing improvements to airport transit systems. These initiatives, coupled with expanded rideshare zones, aim to manage the anticipated surge in passenger volumes while minimizing environmental impact.

Houston's strategic position within the tournament's geography makes it a natural hub for fans traveling between the 16 host cities across North America. The city's extensive flight network, particularly through IAH's international connections, positions it as a key transit point for the competition.