

Eleftherios Venizelos

ATHENS INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Less than ten years after its initial opening, the 'new' airport that serves the Greek capital is seeing a growth in flights – particularly in the domestic sector – despite the global recession. **Tony Dixon** paid it a visit.

Ελευθέριος Βενιζέλος

located 15 miles (26km) to the east of the city of Athens, Eleftherios Venizelos International Airport was opened in 2001 with future expansion in mind. Its two parallel runways are spaced wide enough apart to enable simultaneous operations with its sole terminal (plus satellite), having sufficient capacity to handle the present volume of passenger traffic. However, plans have already been put in place to have up to six terminal 'units' to cope with increased flow in the future.

Hellenikon

The decision to build a new airport was forced upon the airport authorities because the old facility at Hellenikon, closer to the city centre, had reached saturation point. Urban development around its perimeter meant that further expansion was impossible and a new site had to be chosen. In the last year before its closure it had recorded a 15.6% growth rate to reach 13.5 million passengers – the official maximum capacity was 11 million. Just prior to its closure, Hellenikon was handling 57 airlines flying to 87 destinations.

After its closure, the northwest portion of the site was redeveloped and converted into a sports park that housed the venues for canoe/kayak slalom, field hockey, baseball, and softball during the 2004 Summer Olympics. One of the airport's western hangars also became the main Olympic fencing venues and one of the larger indoor basketball arenas.

New Airport

With the growth in passengers at Hellenikon having been predicted from the 1970s, a number of studies had been carried out over the possible construction of a new airport. As many as 19 different locations were looked at before an area close to the town of Spata, northeast of the city, was chosen as the most suitable site. Athens Airport SA, a state-owned company, was established in 1978 to proceed with the plans, however, after a decade >>

Since this image was taken, a new retail park has been built in the top right of the image between the runway and Highway.

"OUR INDUSTRY IS GOING THROUGH ONE OF ITS MOST TURBULENT PERIODS, WHICH REQUIRES THAT THE VOICE OF AIRPORTS BE EVEN MORE ALIGNED AND STRONGLY HEARD AT WORLD LEVEL."



“PASSENGER FIGURES FOR 2008 WERE 16.5 MILLION, WHICH IS LESS THAN OUR CURRENT CAPACITY OF 21 MILLION. AS A RESULT WE ONLY USE THE SATELLITE TERMINAL WHEN REQUIRED.”

of slow development, the project was revived in 1991. The Greek State then launched an international tender for the selection of a partner that would undertake the airport project using a BOOT (Build, Own, Operate and Transfer) scheme and construction company Hochtief of Germany was selected.

The €2.1 billion development began in 1996 and this included major earthwork operations: removing the tops from two hills to clear runway approach paths with the material being used to level the main site. It was scheduled to end in February 2001 but was actually completed the previous October, five months ahead of schedule. However, the opening of

An area close to the town of Spata, northeast of the city, was chosen as the most suitable site for the airport. Three 24 hour express bus services cover the 18 miles (27km) between the airport and the major points in the city.

the airport was delayed by one month due to the surface connections not being completed. A new six-lane road, the Spata-Stavros-Elefsina Freeway, now links the airport to the centre of the city and the surrounding region. Connections have subsequently been improved by the completion of a line of the Athens Metro system, which now

links to the city centre in 30 minutes. This is a lot less than the road journey as, in common with most major cities these days, the centre of Athens can get quite congested at times.

Layout

The main passenger and cargo terminals (plus passenger satellite), associated car parks, engineering hangars, a hotel and a new retail complex that includes an IKEA and Factory Outlet stores, are situated between the two parallel runways. The 1,614,639sq ft (150,000m²) terminal has 157 check-in desks and 14 air-bridges with the satellite having ten more. In addition there are 65 remote aircraft stands. Although it has sufficient capacity to handle current traffic, there is space to add five more terminals in the ‘central’ area should the need arise.

Land Links

Metro Line 3 runs from the airport to Syntagma in the city centre. In addition, three 24-hour express bus



Passenger figures for 2008 were 16.5 million, which is less than the airport's current capacity of 21 million. (All photos Athens International Airport unless stated)

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PASSENGER AIRLINES

- Adria Airways
- Aegean Airlines
- Aer Lingus
- Aeroflot
- AeroSvit
- Air Arabia
- airBaltic
- Air France
- Air Malta
- Air Moldova
- Air One
- Air Transat
- Alitalia
- Armavia
- Athens Airways
- Austrian Airlines
- Baboo
- Blue1
- British Airways
- Brussels Airlines
- Bulgaria Air
- Carpatair
- Cimber Sterling
- Continental Airlines
- Czech Airlines
- Cyprus Airways
- Delta Air Lines
- Donbassaero
- easyJet
- EgyptAir
- El Al
- Emirates
- Etihad Airways
- Finnair
- Georgian Airways
- Germanwings
- Gulf Air
- Hellenic Imperial
- Iberia
- JAT Airways
- KLM
- Libyan Airlines
- LOT Polish
- Lufthansa
- Lviv Airlines
- Malev Hungarian Airlines
- Middle East Airlines
- Norwegian
- Olympic Air
- Pegasus Airlines
- Qatar Airways
- Royal Jordanian
- SAS Scandinavian Airlines
- Singapore Airlines
- Sky Express
- SunExpress Airlines
- Swiss Int'l Airlines
- Syrianair
- Tarom
- Thai Airways International
- Transavia
- Tunisair
- Turkish Airlines
- US Airways
- Uzbekistan Airways
- Vueling



There is a single Executive terminal to the north of the passenger terminal near the maintenance complex.



A new airline to serve Athens in 2009 was Air Arabia of the UAE. (Bill Kokkotas)



services cover the 18-miles (27km) between the airport and the major points in the city. Taxis are also readily available and the journey takes approximately 35 minutes (outside of the rush hour). There are 4,800 short and long-term parking places on site – all of which are equipped with automated payment machines.

Around 30% of all passengers arrive and depart by private car, while another 30% use taxis, with public transport (buses) accounting for 20%. Interestingly about 10% now use the

Metro system (although figures for 2009 show that this is less, this is because the line was closed for nearly six months to finish construction work).

Operations

In November 2009, *Airline World* spoke to Jan Metsovitis, the Director of the Airport's Aviation Business Unit and Thalis Anagnostopoulos, the day's Duty Officer about how the current global financial problems had affected the airport's operations. "Although we are expecting a 2-3% drop in



“ALTHOUGH WE ARE EXPECTING A 2-3% DROP IN PASSENGER NUMBERS FOR 2009, THERE WILL BE AN APPROXIMATE 5% INCREASE IN AIRCRAFT MOVEMENTS.”

Excavation

Being so close to the centre of one of the world's major historical civilisations, it was not surprising that construction and excavation work was delayed after the discovery of important archaeological sites. When one of the local hills was being reduced in height by 131ft (40m) – to obtain the correct clearances for approaching and departing aircraft – the Neolithic fortified site at Zaghani was discovered and work was delayed while it was excavated and recorded. The process was repeated a number of times with other discoveries at areas within the airport's proposed boundary.

PASSENGER TRAFFIC

Month	Domestic			International			Total		
	2009	2008	% change	2009	2008	% change	2009	2008	% change
January	380,056	383,878	-1.0%	570,673	636,615	-10.4%	950,729	1,020,493	-6.8%
February	373,112	362,574	2.9%	495,348	544,573	-9.0%	868,460	907,147	-4.3%
March	413,002	427,747	-3.4%	639,856	763,853	-16.2%	1,052,858	1,191,600	-11.6%
April	499,688	471,723	5.9%	872,800	849,179	2.8%	1,372,488	1,320,902	3.9%
May	515,783	525,119	-1.8%	860,354	995,740	-13.6%	1,376,137	1,520,859	-9.5%
June	594,485	556,773	6.8%	989,970	1,056,541	-6.3%	1,584,455	1,613,314	-1.8%
July	652,792	602,491	8.3%	1,193,863	1,208,543	-1.2%	1,846,655	1,811,034	2.0%
August	677,259	614,424	10.2%	1,241,643	1,265,331	-1.9%	1,918,902	1,879,755	2.1%
September	591,568	568,415	4.1%	1,054,748	1,079,863	-2.3%	1,646,316	1,648,278	-0.1%
October	515,577	504,186	2.3%	859,578	929,889	-7.6%	1,375,155	1,434,075	-4.1%
Year-to-date	5,213,322	5,017,330	3.9%	8,778,833	9,330,127	-5.9%	13,992,155	14,347,457	-2.5%

FLIGHTS

January	6,657	6,916	-3.7%	7,267	7,798	-6.8%	13,924	14,714	-5.4%
February	6,354	6,129	3.7%	6,717	6,856	-2.0%	13,071	12,985	0.7%
March	7,550	7,000	7.9%	7,893	8,079	-2.3%	15,443	15,079	2.4%
April	8,496	7,705	10.3%	9,037	8,609	5.0%	17,533	16,314	7.5%
May	9,076	8,143	11.5%	9,767	9,632	1.4%	18,843	17,775	6.0%
June	9,706	8,550	13.5%	9,783	9,977	-1.9%	19,489	18,527	5.2%
July	10,817	9,492	14.0%	10,750	10,697	0.5%	21,567	20,189	6.8%
August	11,262	9,715	15.9%	10,787	10,886	-0.9%	22,049	20,601	7.0%
September	9,978	8,303	20.2%	9,604	9,897	-3.0%	19,582	18,200	7.6%
October	8,704	7,549	15.3%	8,495	9,069	-6.3%	17,199	16,618	3.5%
Year-to-Date	88,600	79,502	11.4%	90,100	91,500	-1.5%	178,700	171,002	4.5%

The terminal has 14 airbridges with the satellite having ten more. In addition there are 65 remote aircraft stands. This early image was taken soon after the airport's opening in 2001.

passenger numbers for 2009, there will be an approximate 5% increase in aircraft movements, being the only major European airport achieving flight increase in the first nine months of 2009" said Jan. "This is mainly due to the strong dynamics and the expansion in the Greek domestic market. Competition was further increased as we welcomed a newcomer, Athens Airways, now operating 15 routes." It uses four Embraer ERJ 135s and a Bombardier Dash 8.

"Passenger figures for 2008 were 16.5 million, which is less than our current capacity of 21 million. As a result we only use the satellite terminal when required," Thalys added. "There are times when it is needed – such as when Athens hosted the Olympics or when we

Right - A row of aircraft tails belonging to Greek carrier Aegean – one of the main users of the airport.



Top right - Olympic Air has taken over from Olympic Airlines and has acquired a fleet of Airbus A320 Family and Bombardier Dash 8s. (Key – Tony Dixon)

Above right - Construction company Hochtief of Germany was selected to build the airport using a BOOT (Build, Own, Operate and Transfer) scheme.

Above - Transatlantic services are operated by Delta Air Lines with a link to New York and Atlanta (summer only).

handled the fans attending the final of the football Champions League, but we have a good runway and taxiway system and therefore plenty of parking spaces." (At the time of the visit in November 2009, this availability was being used by aircraft from Olympic Airlines, which had just been liquidated – with Olympic Air being formed. As many as 30 Airbus A340s, Boeing 737s, ATR 42s, plus Fokker 50s, B747s, B757s and A320s of other carriers were in temporary storage on the western taxiway awaiting placement.)

"Although the airport is currently licenced as Code E, we could handle the A380 - that is a Code F aircraft - if required – on a diversion for example," said Jan. "Although it officially needs a 60m wide runway, each of ours is 45m >>



with a 7.5m added surface on each side. "We are always looking for new airlines and new routes – particularly in Africa and the Indian sub-Continent. Now that Olympic [Airlines] has stopped its long-haul routes, the door is open for other carriers to fill the gap. Delta, Etihad and KLM have entered a code-share agreement for future co-operation and this may result in extra links. Delta already serves Athens daily from New York and adds Atlanta in the summer months. US Airways and Continental also fly here in the summer along with Air Transat, although Continental plans to increase to year-round for the winter of 2010/2011 and we are hoping that Air Canada will start to Montreal and Toronto. In the first eight months of 2009, we added 12 airlines and eight routes and are one of only a few airports in Europe to achieve this. The main growth – apart from the domestic links – has been to the Middle East, but we have seen expansion in the low-cost sector, both in terms of operators and expansion of route frequency."

FBO

There are a growing number of executive jets that visit Athens and there is an Executive terminal to the north of the passenger terminal near the maintenance complex that handles such traffic. As yet there are no hangars or maintenance facilities for executive jets.

Airports Council International

On November 3, 2009 Dr Yiannis Paraschis, the CEO of Athens International Airport, was elected as the new Vice Chairman of the Airports Council International (ACI). He has also been an active member of ACI Europe. "I am delighted and honoured to serve [in this position] in this critical period

LOW-COST ROUTES			
Winter 08-09			
LCCs	City	Weekly Freq (Winter 08/09)	% Change
clickair	BARCELONA	2	-1
Vueling	BARCELONA	3	0
Brussels AL	BRUSSELS	5	-2
	BERLIN	7	0
	LONDON	20	2
easyJet	MILAN	7	0
	PARIS	7	0
	BARI	3	2
MyAir	VENICE	3	3
	PRAGUE	2	0
SkyEurope	VIENNA	4	0
	Totals	63	4
Summer 2009			
LCCs	City	Weekly Freq (Summer 09)	% Change
clickair	BARCELONA	3	0
Vueling	BARCELONA	7	0
Brussels AL	BRUSSELS	14	0
	BERLIN	7	0
	LONDON	24	-7
	MILAN	14	0
	PARIS	12	-1
easyJet	MANCHESTER*	2	2
	BARI	3	0
MyAir	VENICE	3	0
	PRAGUE	3	0
SkyEurope	VIENNA	7	3
Transavia	COPENHAGEN*	2	2
Cimber Sterling	COPENHAGEN*	2	2
Air Arabia	SHARJAH*	3	3
airBaltic	RIGA**	3	0
Aer Lingus	DUBLIN**	3	-1
Blue1	HELSINKI**	2	0
Germanwings	COLOGNE**	5	0
	STUTTGART**	2	-1
Norwegian	OSLO RYGGE**	2	0
Sun Express	WARSAW**	5	1
	IZMIR	2	2
Pegasus Airlines	IZMIR	3	3
(* NEW route) (** Seasonal route)			



Enthusiasts

There is a McDonalds restaurant landside in the terminal, which gives views over the easterly runway plus taxiing aircraft. Photography is possible but through glass. Outside the terminal, aircraft can be seen from the car parks and from the area around the retail park, but be advised it is not possible to walk between the two and a bus has to be caught – the connecting highway does not have footpaths.

Top left - An increasing number of executive aircraft now use the airport. Premier Aviation Services Raytheon premier 1 SX-FCA (c/n RB-262) sits in the autumn sunshine. (Bill Kokkotas)

Above left - Athens Airways was formed in 2009 and now flies to 15 destinations with its fleet of Embraer ERJ 135s and a Bombardier Dash 8. (Bill Kokkotas)

Above - Main terminal, hotel car park.. The maintenance area is located to the left of the terminal.

Terminal Attractions

In cooperation with the Ministry of Culture, the airport authorities have created the Exhibition of Archaeological Findings from the Airport Area with a specially designed 2,153sq ft (200m²) museum area landside within the terminal. It was inaugurated in 2003 and comprises 172 archaeological artefacts dating from the Neolithic and Early Helladic through the Post-Byzantine period. Nearby is the permanent exhibition of Greek Politician Eleftherios Venizelos – after whom the airport is named. It outlines the important role that he played in shaping the history and social course of the country. His personality and political career are documented through a series of representative photographs that emphasize the events and turning points of his life and highlight his political expertise and activity – including the formation of the Ministry of Aviation. There are also temporary exhibitions held in the same area. The current one – September 2009 – May 2010 – is called 'Miro of Majorca' and covers the work of the renowned Catalan artist with a series of photographs of him and his work.

for our association. Our industry is going through one of its most turbulent periods, which requires that the voice of airports be even more aligned and strongly heard at world level. I hope that my experience will be of help to our world organization in areas such as economics, environment and sustainable development, which are of growing importance in our discussions with both our airline partners and regulators."

Low Cost

One area that has grown in recent years is that of the low-cost carrier. The airport authorities welcome any such operator although Jan Metsovitis did stress that each one pays the same airport fees as a full-service carrier and do use the airbridges where necessary. In 2009, easyJet has opened routes to Paris, Berlin, Geneva and Marseilles and Jan is hopeful of more destinations being added in 2010. 📧/📧

One of the aircraft in storage in November 2009 was this Elite Airlines Boeing 747-SR81 SX-DCB (c/n 22711) configured in a high density fit. (Key – Tony Dixon)



Some of the aircraft in storage in November 2009. (Key – Tony Dixon)

