

'Wayports' could save travelers from hellacious hubs



Business Traveler
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ALL ABOUT WAYPORTS

The Wayports concept was developed in 1987 by a now retired FAA official, James E. Sheppard, during his tenure with the agency. A Wayport is an airport built on a large tract of land located on the fringe of a metropolitan area which hosts an existing hub airport already operating at capacity and regularly experiencing chronic flight delays. The Wayport is built to accommodate a large volume of connecting air traffic and thus offload that traffic from the overcrowded hub.

A logical and cost-effective location for Wayports is on the site of obsolete air force bases formerly used by the Strategic Air Command which are scattered throughout the country. These facilities already have extra long runways needed for the military aircraft that once used these air fields.

High speed or light rail lines would connect each Wayport to surrounding cities with stations located in suburban locations along the route to the city center. Trains and planes are linked together all over Europe and it is time this concept was deployed on our side of the pond. Rail lines could be built along Interstate highway medians to reduce construction costs and land acquisition issues.

Highways would also connect each Wayport to surrounding cities. If highway and rail access are easy, a Wayport may also receive originating/terminating traffic from travelers who prefer the Wayport to their existing airport, especially if there were good parking facilities there and at rail stations along the way.

Private funds or bond issues, rather than taxpayer dollars could be used to construct and operate Wayports and develop the necessary rail, highway, and parking facilities.

Wayport usage would grow as airlines shift or add new operations to each facility and the absence of flight delays and other hassles associated with over-utilized hubs would drive market demand to use these new Wayports.

For more information: Wayports.com

Flight delays have reached an all-time high and the nation's air travel system is in a state of chaos and disrepair. There are simply too many travelers and too many airplanes flying too many flights through an antiquated system that is strained and stressed to the breaking point. Though passenger traffic has more than tripled over the past three decades, only two new U.S. airports (Dallas-Fort Worth and Denver) have been built in the past 50 years and those airports replaced existing facilities. Most airports are running out of expansion room or facing stiff opposition from locals who don't want more noise, congestion, and pollution in their backyards. Against such dire odds, can anything be done to solve the air travel morass?

Current efforts by the Federal government to mitigate flight delays will only bring limited relief. President Bush recently opened up [military airspace](#), but this only affected a limited area briefly and did not address ground delays. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) wants to alter current flight patterns around New York and Philadelphia, but this will only decrease delays by 20% at best and residents in the new flight paths are already lining up to block this measure. The FAA is also considering capping flights and penalizing airlines operating flights at peak times in New York City, but critics of that plan argue that reducing air traffic only stifles economic growth, reduces consumer choices, and raises prices for travelers in affected airports.

A new satellite-based air traffic control system will not be fully operational nationwide until 2025 and will only increase runway capacity by 25% at most, while during the same period the FAA predicts domestic air traffic will double resulting in increased flight delays despite the new system.

While these stopgap measures may have marginal impact on reducing air traffic delays, none address the big picture or provide a comprehensive long term solution to the overcapacity problems that plague the nation's airways. Plus individual airlines, airports, and cities all have their own self-serving political agendas, so relying on these entities to solve the air traffic problem at the national level is a certain recipe for continued chaos and gridlock.

Even the FAA has limited vision and authority in solving the current air traffic mess because this is really a *transportation* problem rather than just an *air travel* problem, and it can only be solved by adopting a cohesive, multimodal, national transportation policy that integrates air, rail, and highway travel into one solution.

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When the U.S. highway system was no longer adequate to handle the transportation needs in the postwar 1950s economic boom, the Federal government implemented the interstate highway system, a new network of limited access, multi-lane super highways facilitating the high-speed transportation of people and goods from city to city. The interstate

highway system did not replace the existing network of U.S. and state roads. It supplemented these routes, shifting long distance traffic to the new network of high speed motorways and providing new capacity to handle the nation's car and truck traffic for the next 50 years and beyond.

We need a solution for the nation's airways like the interstate highway system did for the roads. We need an "interstate aviation system": a new network of nationally planned air routes and facilities to supplement the existing overburdened hub and spoke airline system and relieve pressure and congestion from the country's busiest airports and airways. One proposal for this interstate aviation system is a concept called "Wayports" and it is the best solution I have heard to date to solve the country's growing air traffic problem.

The concept is simple: Relieve the pressure on overutilized hub airports by shifting connecting traffic to other regional facilities. Most hub airports play a dual role handling connecting traffic and passengers originating/terminating in that city. In large hubs like Atlanta Hartsfield, Chicago O'Hare or Dallas-Fort Worth, connecting traffic may comprise as much as 80% of the total flight activity at that airport. As hub operations grow and airlines schedule too many flights too close together chronic flight delays result. But imagine one of those major airports with primarily local origin/destination traffic and little or no connecting passengers. Flight delays would vanish overnight and sanity would return.

Most connecting passengers never leave the airport and can therefore transfer airplanes anywhere. So why do we insist on routing connecting passengers through airports that already serve major population centers?

Wayports could offer a 50-year solution to our flight delay problems, yet the concept was never implemented due to opposition from some powerful opponents. Airlines that operate big hubs and airports and municipalities that host these hubs fear Wayports could undermine the viability of their existing hub airports, and despite the overloaded, gridlocked, status quo, they will lobby hard to oppose Wayports if the concept gains traction again.

I say the time for a national transportation policy is now and Wayports located on the fringes of major cities with high speed rail links into those cities should be the cornerstone of this policy. No one is telling Delta Airlines to give up their hub in Atlanta or American and United in Chicago. But there's a powerful argument that Wayports will supplement the existing airport network, relieve the current epidemic of flight delays, and assure a market driven expansion of the current aviation system for the next 50 years.

The naysayers cry that no airline will fly into a Wayport and passengers won't use them, but I believe if we build it some smart airline will make that Wayport its home and some travelers will gladly fly to or through that Wayport and kiss flight delays goodbye. And I am willing to bet that the big six airlines that operate the major hubs in this country will flock to the Wayports to defend their turf as soon as other airlines move into those facilities.

The time has come for a multimodal national transportation policy integrating a system of Wayports and high speed rail lines. If you agree, contact the [Department of Transportation](#), your [Senator](#) or [Congressman](#) on the Federal transportation Committees and tell them you are fed up with air traffic delays and that a meaningful and comprehensive solution must be implemented now so that our nation's airways will not fall further into gridlock in the coming years.

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Send David your feedback: David Grossman is a veteran business traveler and former airline industry executive. He writes a column every other week on topics of interest and concern to business travelers. E-mail him at travel@usatoday.com.