

LaGuardia Airport

History

The current site of the airport was originally used by the Gala Amusement Park, owned by the Steinway family. It was razed and transformed in 1929 into a 105-acre (42 ha) private flying field named Glenn H. Curtiss Airport after the pioneer Long Island aviator, and later called North Beach Airport.



The initiative to develop the airport for commercial flights began with an outburst by New York mayor Fiorello La Guardia (in office from 1934 to 1945) upon the arrival of his TWA flight at Newark Liberty International Airport — the only commercial airport serving the New York City region at the time — as his ticket said "New York". He demanded to be taken to New York, and ordered the plane to be flown to Brooklyn's Floyd Bennett Field, giving an impromptu press conference to reporters along the way. He urged New Yorkers to support a new airport within their city.

American Airlines accepted La Guardia's offer to start a pilot program of scheduled flights to Floyd Bennett, although the program failed after several months because of Newark's better proximity to Manhattan. La Guardia went as far as to offer police escorts to airport limousines in an attempt to get American Airlines to continue operating the pilot program.

During the Floyd Bennett experiment La Guardia and American executives began an alternative plan to build a new airport in Queens, where it could take advantage of the new Queens-Midtown Tunnel to Manhattan. The existing North Beach Airport was an obvious location, but much too small for the sort of airport that was being planned. With backing and assistance from the Works Progress Administration, construction began in 1937. Building on the site required moving landfill from Rikers Island, then a garbage dump, onto a metal reinforcing framework. The framework below the airport still causes magnetic interference on the compasses of outgoing aircraft: signs on the airfield warn pilots about the problem.

Because of American's pivotal role in the development of the airport, La Guardia gave the airline extra real estate during the airport's first year of operation, including four hangars (an unprecedented amount of space at the time). American also opened its first Admirals Club (and the first private airline club in the world) at the airport in 1939. The club's space was originally a large office space reserved for the mayor, but after receiving criticism in the press, La Guardia offered to lease out the space, and American vice president Red Mosier immediately accepted the offer.

The airport was dedicated on October 15, 1939, as the New York Municipal Airport, and opened for business on that December 2. It cost New York City \$23 million to turn the tiny North Beach Airport into a 550-acre (220 ha) modern facility. Not everyone was as enthusiastic as La Guardia about the project, some regarded it as a \$40-million boondoggle. But the public was fascinated by the very idea of air travel, and thousands traveled to the airport, paid the dime fee, and watched the airliners take off and land. Two years later these fees and their associated parking had already provided \$285,000, and other non-travel related incomes (food, etc.) were another \$650,000 a year. The airport was soon a huge financial success. A smaller airport located in adjacent Jackson Heights, Holmes Airport, was unable to prevent the expansion of the larger airport and it closed in 1940.

Welcome to New York sign

Newark Airport began renovations, but could not keep up with the new Queens airport, which TIME called "the most pretentious land and seaplane base in the world." Even before the project was completed La Guardia had won commitments from the five largest airlines (Pan American Airways, American, United, Eastern Air Lines and Transcontinental & Western Air) that they would begin using the new field as soon as it opened. The airport was used during World War II as a training facility for aviation technicians and as a logistics field. Transatlantic landplane airline flights started in late 1945; some continued after Idlewild opened in July 1948, but the last ones shifted to Idlewild in April 1951.



Newspaper accounts alternately referred to the airfield as New York Municipal Airport and La Guardia Field until the modern name was officially applied when the airport moved to Port of New York Authority control under a lease with New York City on June 1, 1947.

President John F. Kennedy arrives at LaGuardia Airport in 1961

LaGuardia opened with four runways at 45-degree angles to each other, the longest (13/31) being 6,000 ft (1,800 m). Runway 18/36 was closed soon after a United DC-4 ran off the south end in 1947; runway 9/27 (4500 ft) was closed around 1958, allowing La Guardia's terminal to expand northward after 1960. Circa 1961 runway 13/31 was shifted northeastward to allow construction of a parallel taxiway (such amenities being unknown when LGA was built) and in 1965-66 both remaining runways were extended to their present 7,000 ft (2,100 m).

The April 1957 Official Airline Guide shows 283 weekday fixed-wing departures from LaGuardia: 126 American, 49 Eastern, 33 Northeast, 31 TWA, 29 Capital and 15 United. American's flights included 26 nonstops to Boston and 27 to Washington National



(mostly Convair 240s). Jet flights (United 727s to Cleveland and Chicago) started on 1 June 1964.

Later development

Although LaGuardia was a large airport for the era in which it was built, it soon became too small. Starting in 1968 general aviation aircraft were charged heavy fees to operate from LaGuardia during peak hours, driving many GA operators to airports such as Teterboro Airport in Teterboro, New Jersey. The increase in traffic at La Guardia and safety concerns prompted the closure of nearby Flushing Airport in 1984. Also in 1984, to further combat overcrowding at LGA, the Port Authority instituted a Sunday-thru-Friday "perimeter rule" banning nonstop flights from LaGuardia to cities more than 1,500 miles (2,400 km) away; at the time, Denver was the only such city with nonstop flights, and it became the only exception to the rule. (In 1986 Western Airlines hoped to fly 737-300s nonstop to Salt Lake City and unsuccessfully challenged the rule in federal court). Later, the Port Authority also moved to connect JFK and Newark Airport to regional rail networks with the AirTrain Newark and AirTrain JFK, in an attempt to make these more distant airports competitive with La Guardia. In addition to these local regulations, the FAA also limited the number of flights and types of aircraft that could operate at La Guardia.

LaGuardia's traffic continued to grow. By 2000, the airport routinely experienced overcrowding delays, many more than an hour long. That year, Congress passed legislation to revoke the federal traffic limits on LaGuardia by 2007. The reduced demand for air travel following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York City quickly slowed LaGuardia's traffic growth, helping to mitigate the airport's delays. Ongoing Port Authority investments to renovate the Central Terminal Building and improve the airfield layout have also made the airport's operations more efficient in recent years.

FAA approved Instrument Departure Procedure "Whitestone Climb" and the "Expressway Visual Approach to Runway 31" which both overfly Citi Field. In the name of safety when New York Mets games are in progress, these procedures are not supposed to be used, but are anyway.

In late 2006, construction began to replace the air traffic control tower built in 1962 with a more modern one. The tower began operations on October 9, 2010.

Delta-US Airways slot swap

On August 12, 2009, Delta Air Lines and US Airways announced a landing slot and terminal swap in separate press releases. Under the swap plan, US Airways would have given Delta 125 operating slot pairs at LaGuardia. US Airways, in return, would have received 42 operating slot pairs at Ronald Reagan National Airport in Washington, DC, and be granted the authority to begin service from the US to São Paulo, Brazil and Tokyo, Japan. When the swap plan was complete, Delta Shuttle operations would have moved from the Marine Air Terminal to Terminal C (the present US Airways terminal), and Terminals C and D would have been connected together. US Airways Shuttle flights would have moved to the Marine Air Terminal, and mainline US Airways flights would have moved to Terminal D (the present Delta terminal). The United States Department of Transportation announced that they would approve the

Delta/US Airways transaction under the condition that they sell slots to other airlines. Delta and US Airways dropped the slot swap deal in early July 2010 and both airlines have filed a court appeal. In May 2011, both airlines announced that they will resubmit their proposal of the slot swap to the US DOT. It was tentatively approved by the US DOT on July 21, 2011. The slot swap received final approval from the US DOT on October 10, 2011.

On December 16, 2011, Delta Air Lines announced plans to open a new domestic hub at La Guardia Airport. The investment will be the largest single expansion by any carrier at LaGuardia in decades, with total flights increasing by more than 60 percent, and total destinations by more than 75 percent. By summer 2012, Delta will operate 264 daily flights between LaGuardia and more than 60 cities, more than any other airline. Delta will offer more domestic flights and seats from New York's three major airports than any other carrier, with more than 400 daily departures from LaGuardia, JFK and Newark combined to destinations nationwide.

Delta will invest \$100 million to renovate terminals C and D in LaGuardia, where it will operate a total of 32 gates. A 600-foot connector bridge will be built to link the two terminals. Delta also will convert the existing US Airways lounge in Terminal C to a Delta Sky Club, while continuing to operate its current Sky Club in Terminal D. US Airways will build a new club; placement has not been announced.

Terminals, airlines, and destinations

LaGuardia has four terminals connected by buses and walkways. Signage throughout the terminals was designed by Paul Mijksenaar.

Terminal A

Main article: Marine Air Terminal

Marine Air Terminal in 1974

The Marine Air Terminal (MAT) was the airport's original terminal for overseas flights. The waterside terminal was designed to serve the fleet of flying boats, or Clippers, of Pan American Airways, America's main international airline throughout the 1930s and 1940s. When a Clipper would land in Long Island Sound, it would taxi up to a dock where passengers would disembark into the terminal. During World War II new four-engine land planes were developed, and flying boats didn't carry scheduled passengers out of New York after 1947. The last Pan American flight left the terminal in February 1952, bound for Bermuda.

The terminal is home of the largest mural created during the Roosevelt-era Works Progress Administration (WPA) Federal Arts Program. Created by New York artist James Brooks, the mural, *Flight*, encircles the upper rotunda walls, telling the story of man's conquest of the heavens up through 1942



when the work was completed. During the 1950s, many WPA artists were thought to be in collusion with Communists. Several works of art that had been created for post offices and other public facilities were therefore destroyed. Likewise, Flight was completely painted over with wall paint by the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey. In the late 1970s, Geoffrey Arend, an aviation historian and author of *Great Airports: LaGuardia*, mounted a campaign to restore the mural to its original splendor. With the help of Brooks, LaGuardia Airport manager Tim Peirce, and donations from Reader's Digest founders DeWitt Wallace and Laurance Rockefeller, Flight was rededicated in 1980.

In 1986, Pan Am restarted flights at the MAT with the purchase of New York Air's shuttle service between Boston, New York City, and Washington, D.C. In 1991, Delta Air Lines bought the Pan Am Shuttle and subsequently started service from the MAT on September 1. In 1995, the MAT was designated as a historic landmark. A \$7 million dollar restoration was completed in time for the airport's 65th anniversary of commercial flights on December 2, 2004. Along with the Delta Shuttle, general aviation operates from the terminal through a fixed based operator.

Terminal B

The Central Terminal Building (CTB) serves most of LaGuardia's domestic airlines. It is six blocks long, consisting of a four-story central section, two three-story wings and four concourses (A, B, C, and D) with 40 aircraft gates. The \$36 million facility designed by Harrison & Abramovitz was dedicated on April 17, 1964. Delta and US Airways left the CTB in 1983 and 1992 respectively to their own dedicated terminals on the east side of the airport. The Port Authority and various airlines have carried out a \$340 million improvement project in the 1990s and early 2000s (decade) to expand and renovate the existing space.

Terminal C

Terminal C, the 300,000-square-foot (28,000 m²), designed by William Nicholas Bodouva + Associates Architects and Planners, was opened September 12, 1992, at a cost of \$250 million. The original tenant was intended to be Eastern Airlines, but when Eastern was forcibly bankrupt in an effort by parent Texas Air Corporation to merge its assets with that of sister airline Continental Airlines, Continental assumed the leases. Continental never moved in, as it sold its leases and most of its LaGuardia slots to US Airways as part of Continental's bankruptcy restructuring. Trump Shuttle, successor to Eastern Airlines Shuttle, and what is now US Airways Shuttle, also occupied the terminal before becoming part of US Airways. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey says that the terminal handles approximately 50% of regional airliner traffic at LaGuardia.

As a result of a slot-swap deal between Delta Air Lines and US Airways, as of July 2012, Delta occupies the majority of the terminal (Gate C15-C34). Along with Delta, WestJet operates from terminal C from a Delta owned gate (C34), while US Airways now only operates from Gate C35-C44.

Terminal D

Terminal D, opened on June 19, 1983, at a cost of approximately \$90 million and designed by William Nicholas Bodouva + Associates Architects. It was designed to accommodate Delta's new Boeing 757 and Boeing 767 aircraft.

Terminal Redevelopment

In April 2010, Port Authority director Christopher Ward announced that the agency had hired consultants to explore a full demolition and rebuilding of LaGuardia's Central Terminal. The project would create a unified, modern, and efficient plan for the airport, currently an amalgam of decades of additions and modifications. The rebuilding would be staged in phases in order to maintain operations throughout the project. Construction of the new terminal is expected to begin in 2014.

Proposals were due January 31, 2012. Patrick Foye, executive director of the Port Authority, said, "It's got a quaint, nostalgic but unacceptable kind of 1940s, 1950s feel that's just not acceptable."