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IATA Pushing for Airport Checkpoints That Focus on “Bad People”

The International Air Transport Association (IATA), which represents 230 of the world’s passenger and cargo airlines, is pushing for world governments and airports to begin looking at new airport security checkpoints that try to ferret out “bad people” not just “bad things” based on risk mitigation factors, mainly known information about air travelers.

The near-term concept that IATA hopes will be tested at an airport or two in the next year or two would separate checkpoints into three lanes, Known Traveler, Regular, and Enhanced, each employing some variation of technology currently available today, while also employing identity management solutions and risk-based assessments, using for example, terror watchlist databases. Behavior detection techniques would also be a part of the passenger segregation process.

The idea is to “create a total security picture of the traveler...not just a naked one,” says Kenneth Dunlap, director of Security and Travel Facilitation at IATA, says at IATA’s media day last month in Geneva.

The goal of the separate security lanes include improving the travel experience of passengers while providing appropriate levels of physical security depending on the risk each traveler presents.

Current airport security checkpoints are an “incredible mess,” Giovanni Bisignani, director general and CEO of IATA, says at the media day. The process needs to become “more convenient for passengers,” he adds, without compromising security.

Risk Assessment Picture

In IATA’s plan, the security decision on a passenger would occur largely before they reach the airport. For passengers who elect to become Known Travelers through a government- based vetting program, as the traveler approaches a checkpoint security lane, he or she would go to a kiosk to submit a fingerprint, a radio frequency identification-enabled passport and a bar coded boarding pass stored on their mobile phone, Bisignani says. CBP’s Global Entry is such a program and it is already being used for inbound passengers to the U.S.

The U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) already has pre-flight data on passengers through the Secure Flight program, which requires a watchlist check based on a person’s name, date of birth and gender. IATA wants to use this information as part of the checkpoint risk assessment process.

The passenger’s information would go to the airlines and intelligence agencies, Bisignani says. Airlines can help identify potential risk based on whether a passenger pays cash or is traveling with certain equipment, he says. Intelligence agencies would provide their own assessment of each passenger’s security risk.

The risk assessments for a passenger are combined and that person is then “invited” to enter one of three types of security lanes depending on their level of risk, Bisignani, says.

Technologies

At the Known Traveler lane, the screening technology used might be limited to a walk-through metal detector and Advanced Technology X-Ray for carry-on bags.

The Regular Traveler lane would include shoe scanning technology in addition to the walk-through metal detector and AT X-Ray, according to a graphic depiction of the concept contained in Dunlap’s presentation. Whole body imaging technology would be available for secondary screening.

The Enhanced security lane would feature a broader suite of technologies than the Regular lane to include whole body imaging as a primary screening tool as well as other people screening systems and additional baggage

scanning capability, perhaps computed tomography for automated explosives detection.

Both the Regular and Enhanced lanes would also have areas for physical screening or further questioning.

IATA's concept is based on one briefed earlier in the year by a group of long-time aviation security specialists.

"The basic premise is that the level of scrutiny needed to find the kind of threats that are out there today cannot successfully be applied to 100 percent of the passenger stream, for a number of reasons," Steve Wolff, a co-founder of the former InVision Technologies and a member of the Association of Independent Aviation Security Professionals, tells *TR2*. "One is cost. Two is processing speed. And three is the human factors element. You cannot expect a TSO (Transportation Security Officer) or any kind of security guy to spend the same level of intense focus on every person all the time. "It's like concentrating on performing a critical task for your entire shift, every day of the year."

Wolff says the concept of separate security lanes would also allow for upward mobility for TSO's within their respective security organizations, like the TSA.

"Not all TSOs are created equal," Wolff says. A TSO who has better skills such as understanding bombs or imaging system would "put them above your average TSO," he says. These TSOs with a better aptitude would staff the Enhanced security lanes while other security officers "might start in the easy lane" and move to the Regular and Enhanced lanes through promotion, he adds.

IATA's sense of urgency of improving security checkpoints is borne from several factors. One is the fact that airline passenger traffic is on the upswing, with the forecast being 5.5 percent annual growth through 2013. On the other hand, throughput at the checkpoints is decreasing, says Dunlap, and "In some places, we'll see a drop of as much as 50 percent in two years."

Dunlap says the clogged checkpoint is due in part to security measures TSA, and some international airports, implemented following the failed 2009 Christmas Day underwear bombing attempt. That incident prompted the TSA to accelerate its deployments of whole body scanners at checkpoints.

He also says that the current passenger screening system is "showing its age."

Another factor is the rise of passenger frustration with the "inconvenience of security measures," Dunlap says.

To take its checkpoint of the future concept to reality, IATA wants the United Nation's International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to provide the forum for bringing countries together on the matter. Last month IATA met with representatives of the Airports Council International, ICAO, the U.S. and 11 other countries to present the concept, Steve Lott, IATA's spokesman, tells *TR2*.

Out of that meeting it was agreed that there would be a number of subgroups under ICAO to work on the checkpoint of the future, Lott says. IATA will continue to press ICAO to move forward on this, beginning with pilot projects in a year or two, he says.