

POINTS OF VIEW

Time for changes at the airport

They sure are scraping dirt out at Detroit Metro Airport these days.

My Northwest Airlines flight last week from Albany landed (on time) on the south runway. We must have taxied for a good 10 minutes past giant earth movers, big holes in the ground, piles of drain pipe and lots of construction workers.

The theory is the new \$1.2 billion midfield terminal project will open some time in 2001. The project will feature a new mile-long East concourse that will include gates for international flights and a 700-foot-long passenger tunnel connecting with the smaller West concourse. All in all, the project is supposed to add some 60-odd new gates, virtually all destined for Northwest.

That's what has a lot of people worried. Northwest has exploited its near-monopoly position at its "fortress hub" at Detroit Metro to increase its prices to among the highest in the

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nation, while simultaneously allowing passenger service to deteriorate. The question is whether the new terminal project will merely extend Northwest's market dominance or open the abem, gate to increased competition.

Airport director David Katz says he's "confident that as the terminal project gets to completion, we will be able to increase competition at Detroit Metro and, hopefully, bring prices down and increase service quality."

How? Here's Katz's reasoning: Later this year, he will solicit bids to renovate the old Smith and Davey terminals, now the workhorses of Detroit Metro. At present, there are only 14 jet gates available for non-Northwest airlines. Once Northwest moves to the new midfield terminal and after the renovation (which will include eliminating the A, C and E concourses at Smith), a total of 24 gates will be available for non-Northwest carriers, a substantial increase.

Katz says he expects Southwest Airlines to step up its presence at Metro, along with Pro Air, which may find the runways at Detroit City Airport just too short and move some operations to Metro. Although Katz says there's no prospect of other big national carriers - American, Delta, United - tak-



PHILIP POWER

ing on

Northwest by building hubs at Detroit. But he's hopeful each will choose to add gates once the construction is over. And there are other possibilities for increased competition, including TWA, which just bought a bunch of new aircraft.

The obvious fear in all this is that Northwest, anxious to maintain its monopoly, will try to buy all the new gates for its own use. Other airlines, just as anxious as Northwest to maintain their own fortress monopoly hubs, in the past have traded gates around from one airport to another to maintain dominance.

Katz says he doesn't think that will happen. He says the old gate leases, going back to 1959, were "exclusive," which in practice meant they guaranteed Northwest's monopoly. New leases after 2001 will be "preferential" - that is, not exclusively held for one airline or another.

Moreover, says Katz, "I don't think Northwest wants any of the old gates that will be modernized at Smith and Davey terminals." Andrea Fischer Newman, Northwest's vice president of government, law and civic affairs, agrees: "Northwest is not in line for any of these gates."

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Maybe, just maybe, the new midfield terminal and the rebuilt old terminals will result in a better facility for all passengers and a more competitive environment between air carriers. This might even bring down fares and improve passenger service. If so, that's called getting the best of both worlds.

Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1880, or by e-mail at ppower@eeonline.com

Prediction: Change they may, libraries are here to stay

Some pessimistic futurists have predicted the end of the public library as we know it - a physical building which houses books and other materials that are owned by and shared among taxpayers. This prediction is based on the Information Revolution, whose impact rivals that of the Industrial Revolution.

While the advent of the Internet has had dramatic impact on the delivery of information resources, I predict that public libraries will continue to be a valued part of our society many years from now. However, the library's mission and services will continue to change to meet public expectations.

I offer the following projections for a healthy, vital public library:

- Information technology will become increasingly important, with greater percentages of the library budget dedicated to resources that can be accessed from people's homes or offices. Today, in addition to the library catalog and the Internet, users can access: encyclopedias, full-text articles from magazines, health information, business and investment data, literary criticisms, history, biography and science - among a myriad of other resources. This menu of resources will only be expanded in the future.

- Technology will attract new library users, including some who will use the library resources without ever physically visiting the library building.

- Public libraries will be the "equalizer" between the information haves and have-nots. While many in our community are fortunate to have home computers, the public library will provide access to electronic information much in the same role that Ben Franklin once described libraries as the "poor man's university."

- Library staff will help people pursue lifelong learning interests. Presently, staff conduct Internet resources classes, training the public in using these resources independently and in evaluating their accuracy or reliability. Special classes are available to Cyber Seniors and to families.

- The librarian will assist the public as a "mediator" of information, using his/her skills to know the means of best obtaining the data needed by the patron. As John

GUEST COLUMNIST



BEVERLY PAPAII

Ferry Barlow, regular contributor to Wired Magazine, states: "Librarians separate information from data, knowledge from information, and meaning from noise."

Print resources will continue to be an important part of the library's collection. While some reference information will only be available in digital form, people will still receive pleasure from actually holding a book to read.

The public library will continue to serve a unique role in working with parents of very young children to encourage early childhood development skills. Recent brain research has demonstrated the importance of reading to children during the first year of life, as one of the predictors of academic and life success. The public library is the only institution in place to assist parents with this responsibility.

The public library building will continue to be a place to which people choose to visit - for quiet study, for browsing, for casual reading, for being with other people.

The celebration of National Library Week offers an opportunity to reflect on the heritage and the future of the Farmington Community Library. The predictions above are but a small sample of the analysis and planning in which the library staff and board engage. I am grateful to our voters, who supported a millage that will improve the library's buildings, collections, and services. On behalf of the staff and Library Board, I remain dedicated to assuring that we continue to meet public needs and expectations.

Beverly Papai is the director of the Farmington Community Library.

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