

## New Terminal at St. Augustine Airport Nears Completion as New Service About to Start

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PETER.WILLOTT@STAUGUSTINE.COM Workers prepare to pour concrete next to the Northeast Florida Regional Airport's new terminal building in St. Augustine on Monday, April 4, 2016. The area will become the new building's baggage claim area when the terminal opens on Thursday, April 14, 2016. The 14,000 square foot building took the airport 110 days to build and will receive its first passengers on April 14 when a Frontier Airlines plane arrives from Chicago

Frontier Airlines flights through the Northeast Florida Regional Airport will resume Thursday, and the terminal experience promises to be an improved one for those passing through.

In the last 3½ months, the airport authority has overseen a renovation of the terminal building.

“We’re very excited about the new building,” said Ed Wuellner, executive director of the airport authority. “We think the overall experience is going to be dramatically better for everyone.”

The \$4 million overhaul was done to better serve customers for two new routes Frontier is adding through St. Augustine: Chicago and Philadelphia.

Those two destinations replace the previous service to Trenton, N.J., which ended Jan. 4.

Funding for the project comes from airport revenues and a matching grant from the state, Wuellner said. The airport authority is a taxing agency but has not imposed an ad valorem tax in recent years.

Wuellner said airport staff noticed damage to the old terminal structure shortly before the Trenton service was scheduled to end. With an estimated cost of \$1 million to fix the outside of the building, Wuellner said the best plan was to invest in a more permanent building that is 40 percent larger than the old one.

The new terminal is built by tilt wall construction. The process, as described by tiltup.com, is: “The building’s walls are poured directly at the jobsite in large slabs of concrete called ‘tilt-up panels’ or ‘tilt wall panels.’ These panels are then raised into position around the building’s perimeter forming the exterior walls.”

Among the improvements passengers will see, according to Wuellner, are a larger lobby, more spacious waiting area, windows and enhanced restrooms.

A new baggage claim area is also being constructed, but it won’t be completed until the summer.

With just 110 days between Frontier flights, Wuellner said it was a tight construction window and not everything will be done until mid June.

But the terminal will be functional when the first flight from Chicago's O'Hare International Airport arrives at 8:13 p.m. Thursday. The first Philadelphia flight will arrive at 2:23 p.m. Friday.

While constructing a new terminal building was not part of the commitment to get Frontier to add the service at the St. Augustine airport, the company did express support for the project.

"The terminal improvement was not required for continued Frontier service, but we are pleased that Frontier's success at St. Augustine has helped pave the way for airport improvements benefiting customers there," said Frontier spokesman Robert Westgate, in an email to The Record.

Westgate added that there were no plans to add any other routes through St. Augustine.

But the new larger terminal does make that a possibility, Wuellner said. The waiting area for passengers who have gone through the security checkpoint is now large enough to accommodate two full flights on 180-seat Airbus A320 aircraft, which are to be used on the Chicago-St. Augustine route.

That also means it's possible for two flights to be scheduled through St. Augustine at similar times.

"We can handle two big airplanes at the same time [at the terminal]," Wuellner said.

Also flying out of the St. Augustine airport is ViaAir, which operates flights to and from Charlotte, N.C, on Thursdays and Sundays using the 30-passenger EMB-120.