

London Gatwick's £2.5 billion (€3.2bn) investment programme is transforming the passenger journey and putting travellers in control of their time at the airport, as **Guy Stephenson**, Chief Commercial Officer, explains to **Ross Falconer**.

Gatwick transformation "a glimpse into the future of airport design"

London Gatwick is halfway through a £2.5 billion (€3.2bn) investment programme, which is redeveloping and transforming the airport to support rapid growth. Over 41 million passengers travelled through Gatwick in the last 12 months – a full decade ahead of predictions.

The transformation is tangible across all aspects of the passenger journey. "Gatwick is investing in technology that will help speed passengers through the airport, while also improving their experience by reducing queues and putting passengers in control of their time at the airport," explains Guy Stephenson, Chief Commercial Officer, London Gatwick Airport.

At the heart of this is an efficient check-in process. The airport recently opened the world's largest self-service bag drop zone, increasing peak check-in capacity from 3,000 to 4,350 passengers per hour.

Gatwick's biggest airline, easyJet, is located in the new area and now has the space to move all of its South Terminal flights to the North Terminal, creating a



much simpler experience for passengers flying with the airline.

The technology enables travellers who have checked in online to take their bags straight to a machine upon arrival, where they can print their luggage tag, apply it to their bag and load it straight onto Gatwick's newly modernised baggage sorting system. The North Terminal now has 48 Materna self-service bag drop units, with others located in the South Terminal. This means the check-in process can be completed in just a couple of minutes.

"The new self-service bag drop has been very positively received by passengers seeking to take control of their journey and avoid the queues," Stephenson enthuses. "The area provides passengers with a glimpse into the future of airport design and enables them to be early adapters to the most innovative, state-of-the-art facilities."

Materna is Gatwick's self-service bag drop partner, providing the kiosks and hardware, and developing and hosting the airline self-service bag drop application. Gatwick chose Materna because it met the greatest number of the airport's

Guy Stephenson, Chief Commercial Officer, London Gatwick Airport: "Gatwick is the ninth largest airport in Europe in terms of passenger traffic, with 5.7% growth year-on-year in 2015. This is evidence of the success in attracting new routes, which are vital to the interests of the airlines operating from Gatwick."

needs, including visa checking, excess baggage payments, and the handling of sporting equipment.

eezeetags cooperated closely with Materna on the Gatwick installation, having already enjoyed a successful collaboration on self-service bag drop installations for Lufthansa at Frankfurt, Munich and Hamburg airports.

"This is a very important milestone for eezeetags, and also for the airport and the main user easyJet. London Gatwick will connect more airlines to this service and easyJet sees this location more or less as a blueprint for all airports it operates at," says Borry Vrieling, founder and Managing Director,

eezeetags. "easyJet and Gatwick tested several self-tagging possibilities and drew the conclusion that eezeetags has the best performance, not only on quality and speed, but even more on the passenger experience. That is why we are cooperating on a planned European roll-out of self bag drop installations, using eezeetags as the preferred self-tagging bag tag."

It was, he adds, an easy connection between Materna's hardware and the eezeetags. "Materna chose to use a special printer supplier for the Gatwick installation, giving the benefit of two XXL rolls of eezeetags (675 pieces per roll) inside the kiosk. The benefit is that there is almost no downtime due to the simple reason that the media is out of stock."

Alongside check-in and bag drop, Gatwick's comprehensive investment across the airport journey takes in security, piers, gate rooms, retail, food & beverage, and the airfield. Initiatives to streamline the arrivals experience include new e-gate technology in the immigration hall.

Transformation of the North Terminal is nearing completion, and a £30 million (€38m) investment in security is a big part of this

programme of work. "This summer we will open the very latest and most sophisticated security technology anywhere in the world, with 10 new security lanes enabling 5,000 passengers per hour to pass through security," Stephenson explains. "This will halve the amount of time currently taken, while maintaining the strictest security measures, and is another example of how Gatwick can accommodate increasing numbers of passengers from its existing infrastructure."

"Long haul premier league"

Gatwick is, of course, always looking for opportunities to serve new markets, drive competition between airlines and, as a result, create greater choice for passengers. Three years of consecutive month-on-month growth indicate the success of its proactive route development strategy.

"Gatwick is launching 20 new long haul routes in 2016, moving it into the premier league of European airports that fly more than 50 long haul routes," Stephenson enthuses. "The long haul network is only expected to increase further as Gatwick grows and takes advantage of new aircraft that can fly further without the need to change at a hub."

Gatwick recently opened the world's largest self-service bag drop zone, increasing peak check-in capacity from 3,000 to 4,350 passengers per hour. Gatwick's biggest airline, easyJet, is located in the new area. Materna provided the hardware, while eezeetags provides the bag tags.

WestJet, Air Canada Rouge and Tianjin Airlines are Gatwick's newest airlines, building on the revolution of long haul, low-cost flying, which was so successfully pioneered by Norwegian from Gatwick.

"We are also thrilled to welcome Cathay Pacific back to Gatwick, and Emirates committing three daily A380 services and an additional fourth daily service to Dubai," Stephenson adds. "British Airways also continues to invest in its long haul services from Gatwick, launching new routes to New York, Costa Rica, and the first direct service to Lima from London in 30 years."

WestJet is providing 28 weekly flights to Canada, while Tianjin Airlines is launching a twice-weekly route linking Gatwick to Chongqing and Tianjin – the UK's only connection to the two fast-developing Chinese cities.

By seeking to eliminate queues and put passengers in control, Gatwick's objective is to move the original experience from something that was to be endured to something that can be enjoyed. "The transformation we have made in our departure lounges has created an environment which allows them to spend time in the way they want – doing some work, or having a bite to eat and enjoying the shops," Stephenson concludes.