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Contact: Janet Zink, Director of Communications  
Office: (813) 554-1460  
Cell: (813) 220-8279

**Airport plans renovations to accommodate international flights, improve customer service**

Jan. 5, 2012 (TAMPA) With a new focus on attracting overseas flights to Tampa International Airport, CEO Joe Lopano has proposed renovations to accommodate this growing part of the airport's business.

A \$27.6 million upgrade of the airport's Airside F will expand TPA's ability to handle baggage and improve the flow of passengers through security and customs so that the airside can manage up to three wide-body international flights simultaneously. That should meet anticipated demand at the airport over the next several years, Lopano said.

Airside F, which opened in 1987, handles most of TPA's international flights, including recently expanded daily nonstop service to London and four-times-a-week flights to Cuba, which were launched late last year. Beginning in May, Edelweiss will fly nonstop twice a week between Tampa and Zurich, Switzerland, also using Airside F.

"Our international traffic is growing and that trend will continue," Lopano said. "Beginning this fall, we will face a situation where both the Edelweiss flights serving Zurich and our daily British Airways flights will be arriving at Airside F within an hour of each other. The facility needs improvements to guarantee a high level of service now, and in the future, when even more flights will be arriving in a tight time frame."

Previous plans had called for moving international operations to a new North Terminal, a \$1 billion project slated to come on line in 2015. But the downturn in the economy and the resulting decline in passenger traffic forced postponement of that expansion until at least 2023.

The Airside F renovation is a lower-cost solution that meets immediate needs, Lopano said.

Currently, the area has only one baggage claim device. Plans call for adding two baggage claim devices and adding two booths for passport checks (bringing the total to eight), as well as adding and improving TSA screening lanes, relocating queues at security checkpoints, increasing concessions space and updating the WiFi network.

"These improvements will dramatically improve customer service right away, and maintain that service as the number of international flights serving the airport continues to grow," Lopano said. (cont.)

The project requires approval of a budget revision by the Hillsborough County Aviation Authority board. A briefing on the project is scheduled for the board meeting set for Jan 12 at 9 a.m. If approved, design would begin in March 2012, with construction of the first phase completed by the end of the year and the entire upgrade completed by September 2013.

Under Lopano's leadership, the airport is aggressively pursuing more international flights, and scored an early success with the announcement of the Zurich flights late last year. The Zurich flights will have a \$32 million economic impact on the region and create more than 250 jobs. Studies show one nonstop daily flight to a major European city would have a \$150 million economic impact on the region and create 1,200 jobs. Air service priorities for the airport include flights to Frankfurt, Germany; Sao Paolo, Brazil; Bogota, Colombia; Panama City, Panama; Mexico City, Mexico; and the Caribbean.

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