



**COMMISSION  
AGENDA MEMORANDUM**

**Item No.** 7a

**BRIEFING ITEM**

**Date of Meeting** June 11, 2019

**DATE:** May 24, 2019  
**TO:** Stephen P. Metruck, Executive Director  
**FROM:** Julie Collins, Director AV Customer Service  
**SUBJECT:** AV Customer Service Overview Briefing

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (SEA) has long valued the importance of providing helpful service to customers. As the passenger volumes through SEA have dramatically increased, from 33 million in 2012 to almost 50 million in 2018, the Airport's Managing Director recognized the need to elevate the emphasis on customer service through the creation of a stand-alone department. Formed in May 2018, the AV Customer Service Department encompasses functions including front-line customer care (i.e. Pathfinders, Airport Volunteers), communications (i.e. brand strategy, real-time customer communications), AV Training & Development and the Lost & Found office.

Through the broader lens of customer experience, the department provides leadership and coordination around programs including: development of an airport-wide employee recognition program, customer satisfaction benchmarking strategies, and managing stakeholder groups including the Customer Service Excellence Action (SEA) Team and a new Frequent Traveler Committee. The Customer Service Department also serves as an integrator of individual department efforts, such as advancing a cohesive wayfinding strategy, with the goal of delivering helpful information to create a seamless and positive travel journey for the customers at SEA.

This briefing will summarize some of the key initiatives underway to improve the customer experience and, at the request of the commission, will describe the various research methods the airport utilizes to track and improve customer satisfaction.

**BRIEFING OVERVIEW**

There are a wide-variety of factors that influence the customer experience at an airport including the ease of getting to and navigating through the airport, the comfort and performance of the facility, the availability of desired amenities and the efficiency of airport operations. There is also significant emphasis placed on caring for the safety of customers. As

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the nation's 8<sup>th</sup> largest airport, SEA strives to be a leader among peer airports in delivering an excellent customer experience.

Customer service in the aviation industry is commonly measured through key research methods including: the Airport Service Quality (ASQ) survey, Skytrax Rankings and J.D. Powers consumer surveys. Used together, these tools provide a well-rounded view of SEA's performance compared with peer airports in North America.

This briefing will summarize the research methods used to measure customer satisfaction, the current performance of SEA compared to peer airports in North America and actions underway to improve the airport's standing.

**Research Results:**

There are three prominent airport industry survey methods that measure customer sentiment about airports around the world. They are:

- **Airport Service Quality (ASQ)** – Industry benchmark established through passenger surveys (in-terminal) of 28 key airport attributes. Over 320 airports in 80 countries participate in the ASQ program. Sea-Tac prioritizes six key service qualities (e.g. washroom cleanliness, security screening, staff courtesy, wayfinding, comfort at gate hold rooms and Wi-Fi). From 2014 to 2018, scores in each of the six primary categories have dropped. Of the 25 U.S. peer airports measured, Sea-Tac ranks between 21-24 in all categories except Wi-Fi (#11).
- **Skytrax** – Measures customer satisfaction via on-line surveys for airlines and airports around the world. Awards a prestigious 5-star ranking based on 39 attributes with over 550 participating airports. In 2019, SEA received the top award for Airport Staff Service in North America and was ranked #10 overall for all airports between 40-50 million people. SEA conducted an independent Skytrax Audit in December to benchmark its customer service performance with recommendations for improvement. SEA currently has a 3-star ranking. Our key competitors for international services, San Francisco (SFO) and Vancouver, B.C. (YVR), have 4-star rankings.
- **J.D. Power** – Annual awards are highly regarded by consumers. Quarterly on-line survey of over 31,000 respondents measuring customer satisfaction at 64 North American airports. Sea-Tac ranked #13 out of 20 peer airports in 2018 (down from #10 in 2017) for overall customer satisfaction.

**Performance Goals:**

SEA has participated in the ASQ since 2011 and it serves as a key benchmark for establishing short-term and long-term goals toward improving customer satisfaction. For 2019, the AV Division is working toward the goal of: "Attain and exceed 5-year average ASQ score for at least two of the six key service attributes". Given the ability to influence improvement in the near-term, the two areas of emphasis are: staff courtesy/helpfulness and Wi-Fi. For the longer term,

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SEA seeks to exceed the 5-year average ASQ score for all six key service attributes and attain a Skytrax 4-star rank by 2024. This timeframe is based on the completion of major capital projects such as the International Arrivals Facility and the North Satellite modernization.

**Customer Service Initiatives:**

Improving the customer experience at SEA requires simultaneous employment of near-term and long-term strategies. An early emphasis for the department has also been to establish foundational groundwork for launching future initiatives such as: developing and executing an airport-wide customer service curriculum called WE ARE SEA, improving customer service-specific communication capabilities such as real-time engagement with customers in the terminal via social media and simplifying the call-in experience, and creating shared customer service expectations and cohesive communication through the establishment of a brand identity for Sea-Tac Airport.

The Customer Service Department dedicates significant attention and resources to providing in-person assistance to travelers. As outlined in the Summer 2019 Travel Awareness Briefing, Customer Service plays an integral role in helping travelers navigate the security screening process as well as assisting customer throughout the terminal. A key priority is growing the Airport’s volunteer program and emphasizing the proactive delivery of information to customers.

Customer Service Department staff are actively engaged in the work underway to support customer-focused amenities at SEA (e.g. accessibility improvements, new communication options via APPs, improved information services to customers through a more robust system of “information hubs”, nursing suites, etc.) as well as the delivery of new capital projects.

This briefing is an opportunity to discuss the shared commitment to advancing a research and traveler feedback-driven strategy to enhance the customer experience at Sea-Tac.

**ATTACHMENTS TO THIS BRIEFING**

- (1) Presentation slides