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Why Daley's O'Hare expansion will not "relieve" delays

The reason is as simple as two plus two. If you double the airport capacity and double the flights at O'Hare, you haven't changed a thing. That's basically the problem with the Daley-Ryan expansion.

Common sense might tell you that the plan to build six parallel runways would provide plenty of capacity to avoid delays. But here's the problem. As Craig Burzych, Facility Representative at the O'Hare Tower of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, points out: Both pairs of new parallel runways nearest the terminals are too close to each other (1,200 feet) to be used simultaneously for arrivals. One can only be used for departures and only one for arrivals. So, right from the start, only four, not six runways will be available for simultaneous arrivals or departures.

But it gets worse in bad weather. Under instrument flight rules, these two sets of runways cannot be used simultaneously at all. "They must basically be operated as one runway for safety reasons," he said. So, with 1.6 million operations scheduled for six runways, in bad weather, only two-thirds, or four runways, will be available. Compare that with today's configuration. In good weather three runways are available for arrivals and departures. In bad weather, one is shut down. So, only two-thirds of the runways are available for operations, the same ratio under bad weather conditions with the Daley-Ryan plan.

There's still more: Daley's claims of huge delay reductions are based on a capacity/delay computer model that assumed that there was no growth in future traffic. The claimed reductions in delays are based on 900,000 annual operations, not the 1.6 million that the Daley-Ryan plan promises. Put in the 1.6 million flights and the delays rise exponentially.

And this: How do they plan to prevent delays during the decade-long attempt to build an entirely new airport on top of an already overcrowded O'Hare? Remember the Kennedy reconstruction delays?

And finally this: Using Illinois Transportation Sec. Kirk Brown's own calculations, the new northern runway will be obsolete before it opens. Where will the extra planes go? Denver?

For further explanation, contact: John Geils, 630-766-3232 or 630-564-2390; Craig Johnson, 847-437-0030 or 847-437-8226, or Joseph Karaganis, 312-836-1177 ext.140, or 312-285-3777

For an informative Dec. 19, 2001 **WBEZ-FM interview with Craig Burzych**, discussing these and other operational problems, go to http://www.wbez.org/services/848_radec01.htm

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