ACRP Problem Statement No. 14-01-10  

**Recommended Allocation: $400,000**

**Improving Airport Customer Experience**

**ACRP Staff Comments:** The proposed research would build on ACRP 07-08, Improving Terminal Design to Increase Revenue Generation and Customer Satisfaction. In addition, ACRP Synthesis 01-06, How Airports Measure Customer Service Performance, identified further research to include a guidebook as described in this problem statement.

**TRB Aviation Group Committees Comments:** AIRPORT TERMINALS AND GROUND ACCESS: Support. Very well defined problem statement that is timely and relevant to the industry. Takes a comprehensive and holistic approach to the issue of customer service. It is realistic in taking into consideration the financial constraints airports face, includes ROI for strategies, and suggests a flexible customizable result. We recommend that the tasks go beyond examining peer airports and public agencies, and investigate customer service techniques used by the private sector to provide outstanding customer service. Companies that come to mind include Disney, Zappos, and Nordstrom. New technologies providing information, varying forms of payment and other items directly related to the customer experience are playing a larger role each year. However, the cost estimate seems excessive. Developing this guidebook should include some method of measuring the success of the implemented programs. Also, we note that ACI-NA holds periodic customer service seminars (see http://www.aci-na.org/event/2410) where strategies to improve customer service are discussed.

**Review Panel Comments:** Recommended.—The proposed research has a high probability of success because data is available through airports, ASQ, and other customer experience metrics such as provided in Passenger Value of Time study (ACRP 03-19). The biggest airports are doing many things to track passenger experience through marketing departments. Smaller airports have to address these issues differently, but there is value in disseminating experience from larger airports. Problem statement 14-01-02 should be incorporated into this problem statement.
Airport Cooperative Research Program
Problem Statement

Problem Number: 14-01-10

1. TITLE: Improving Airport Customer Experience

2. BACKGROUND: More than at any time in their history, airports must strive for an exceptional customer experience in order to grow. With load factors at all-time highs, inconsistent security wait times, and airlines pinching pennies (and staff), the “hassle factor” of traveling is a risk to passenger growth. Travelers may choose alternate modes of transportation, change destinations within driving distance, utilize competing airports, or cancel trips altogether if using the airport is difficult. Furthermore, it has been shown that “delighted” customers spend more money at airports (45% more according to a 2010 J.D. Powers study). While significant data exists to help airports benchmark their customer service performance, notably the Airport Service Quality passenger satisfaction surveys, there is very little guidance available about how to improve.

Implementing customer service improvement programs, for obvious reasons, typically takes a backseat to the day-to-day challenges of operating an airport. The benefits of creating a great customer experience are many, yet multiple airports still have no formal customer experience program along with no senior-level staff responsible for ensuring passengers have a great experience. Furthermore, Airports do not control many aspects of the customer experience, such as flight check-in, baggage handling, and security screening. Overcoming these challenges requires management focus and deployment of increasingly scarce resources. Yet, spending to increase the passenger experience can have true, monetary gains. Airport boards and management need confidence in the success of their approach and its return on investment in order to proceed.

A Guidebook detailing best practices, methodologies to monitor and improve customer experience, and technologies that can assist, will enable airport executives at airports of all sizes to take steps to improve the customer experience, how to monitor performance, and incentivize employees to provide outstanding customer service. In addition, the study would detail proven methods to engage other airport stakeholders, including airlines, tenants, and governmental agencies, to work together to improve the passenger experience. Finally, there are many innovative technologies that can help improve the customer experience by providing up-to-date, pertinent information. The proposed research will enable airports to select a program and level of effort right for each community.
3. **OBJECTIVE**: This study will provide a guidebook on airport customer service provision, with an overview of best practices used by airports and similar facilities, that have employed customer service practices in investment decision-making. Furthermore, this study will focus on the customer service investment return. Finally, this report will outline how Airports can provide better customer service and increase their airport specific traveler experience.

4. **PROPOSED TASKS**:

The research should include, but not be limited to the following tasks:

- Conduct a literature review to identify best practices in customer service at airports and at similar public-use agencies. The literature review should also detail the benefits of excellent customer service.
- Provide an overview of technology solutions that can improve customer service.
- Identify several leading airports for customer service and develop case studies detailing their customer experience programs, implementation, and monitoring.
- Develop an interactive workbook that will assist airport executives in developing a customer experience improvement program.

5. **ESTIMATED FUNDING**: $400,000

6. **ESTIMATED RESEARCH DURATION**: 12 Months

7. **RELATED RESEARCH**

*ACRP Report 20: Guidebook for Strategic Planning in the Airport Industry* provides insight into the strategic planning process, of which customer service is a key component. However, the Report is focused on high-level goals such as missions, visions, and performance measurement, and less so on the nuts-and-bolts of improving customer service.

*ACRP Report 26: Guidebook for Conducting Airport User Surveys* provided methods and useful information for conducting effective user surveys at airports. The guidebook introduced the basic concepts of survey sampling and the steps involved in planning and implementing a survey; described the different types of airport user surveys; and provided guidance on how to design a survey and analyze its results. However, it does not provide guidance on improving customer service experiences.

*ACRP Report 19: Developing an Airport Performance Measurement System* provided a basis on which to initiate and maintain a successful performance measurement program. However, customer service is not a key indicator.

*2010 North America Airport Satisfaction Study, J.D. Power and Associates*
Analysis and data surrounding customer satisfaction with Airports in the U.S. and Canada. Provides data on “delighted” vs “disappointed” passenger spending in airport facilities, highlighting greater ROI in customer service minded airports. 
http://www.jdpower.com/content/detail.htm?jdpaArticleId=1320

Bangor International Airport debuts passenger loyalty rewards program
Article discussing a unique step for airports, but not other industries, taken by Bangor International to increase customer service and passenger loyalty:

8. PROCESSED USED TO DEVELOP THE PROBLEM STATEMENT: Much of this statement was developed from professional experience with airport information technology and its application to the traveler experience, however:

The topic was also discussed in the Airport Consultants Council (ACC) Finance Committee and identified as a strong candidate for ACRP.

Consultants with experience on different perspectives of the customer experience – one technological, Zachary Varwig of Faith Group, the other strategic and management consulting, collaborated on this problem statement.

9. PERSON SUBMITTING PROBLEM STATEMENT:

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