



Air Transport

TSA Plans Public-Private Registered Traveler Program

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Secure ID vendors cooperate on standards; TSA sets start date for Registered Traveler

Who Do You Trust?

Now that the U.S. government has set a June deadline for launching a nationwide Registered Traveler (RT) security program, the private sector is moving swiftly to standardize technology and business rules to let pre-screened frequent fliers bypass airport security hassles.

A group of more than 60 U.S. airports that have been pushing for a nationwide RT program last week selected identity assurance software provider Daon to lead the effort in making identification technologies compatible, or interoperable, among airports.

"Our primary role is to help define a national interoperability specification that will work and serve the program," Daon CEO Tom Grissen told Aviation Week & Space Technology after the second meeting of the Service Provider Council since the RT start-up date was set. The council was created by the 60 airports, known as the Registered Traveler Interoperability Consortium (RTIC).

THE RTIC, IN TURN, was organized by the American Assn. of Airport Executives (AAAE), which has been calling for an interoperable RT program to trim security checkpoint delays for trusted travelers and focus airport screeners' energies on other passengers.

The Registered Traveler pilot program at Orlando International Airport has many elements that TSA is seeking in a national program.

"We're trying to pull the pieces together at the speed of industry rather than the speed of government," says Carter Morris, AAAE's senior vice president for Transportation Security Policy. Big names in biometrics, information technology and security such as Unisys, Raytheon, Covenant Aviation Security, Viisage Technology and Sagem Morpho Inc. have joined the council.

"It's open to virtually anybody who has demonstrated they have business in this or a related area," says Morris, noting that a company like Covenant doesn't have expertise in biometrics, "but they sure know a lot about line management and how to do some of the passenger processing that's going to be so important to the RT program." Edmund (Kip) Hawley, director of the Transportation Security Administration, told Congress recently the agency planned to roll out RT nationally on June 20, 2006.

"We are committed to the RT program," Hawley said, adding that TSA planned to issue rules on Jan. 20 for biometric identification data. In exchange for undergoing background checks, supplying biometric data and paying a yet-to-be-determined service fee, registered travelers will be able to skip regular security checkpoint lines. They will still have to pass through metal detectors and their carry-on bags will still be X-rayed, but they won't be subject to secondary screening, unless they trip an alarm.

Rep. John Mica (R-Fla.), chairman of the House aviation subcommittee, said it was "well past the time for TSA to adopt a biometric standard" and urged the agency to stick to its time line. TSA plans a public-private RT program where government conducts the background checks and certifies private vendors to manage enrollment, data-gathering and promotion at airports. The program, to be funded by user fees, will use smart card technology likely to include both fingerprint and iris scan data.

Hawley said TSA would also announce Jan. 20 what benefits RT participants will receive--such as exemption from having to remove shoes or coats at checkpoints--in exchange for voluntary registration. But he also wants to make those members-only benefits flexible to keep potential terrorists off balance (AW&ST Sept. 5, p. 21). TSA plans to select a company on Apr. 20 to certify the private vendors providing enrollment and verification services. At that time industry also will present plans to give registered travelers reciprocal privileges at all airports.

Risk management and maximizing private sector involvement are key elements of the Homeland Security Dept.'s top-to-bottom policy overhaul under Secretary Michael

Chertoff. The need for both is apparent as lines and waiting times grow at many airport security checkpoints. More than 700 million passengers travel the U.S. aviation system annually--and there are projected to be 1 billion by 2015--but the number of TSA screeners at the nation's 400-plus commercial airports is capped by Congress at 45,000 and expected to be trimmed due to funding cuts during Fiscal 2006.

The TSA ended five small RT pilot programs in September. A sixth, overseen by TSA but run by a private company, continues at Orlando (Fla.) International Airport. Registered travelers flying out of Orlando use a members-only lane. To qualify, they must pass a government background check, submit biometric data and pay \$79.95 a year. To date, more than 10,000 people have signed up for the Orlando program run by Verified Identity Pass, a New York-based company founded by author and entrepreneur Steven Brill. Between June 22 and Sept. 16, Orlando RT members spent on average 4 sec. waiting to clear security. The waiting time for non-members averaged 4 min., 16 sec. The longest any RT member had to wait was 3 min., compared to more than 31 min. for non-members.