

Aviation committee OKs 5 new O'Hare gates for American Airlines



An American Airlines plane at O'Hare International Airport on Sept. 19, 2014. (Phil Velasquez / Chicago Tribune)

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The Chicago City Council's aviation committee on Wednesday unanimously approved a plan by [American Airlines](#) to add five new gates at [O'Hare International Airport](#), the first major expansion to gate capacity since Terminal 5 was built in 1993.

The new gates, which will be in Terminal 3 and are intended for regional jets, are expected to be completed sometime in 2018. With the addition, the number of gates at O'Hare will grow to 194 from 189.

American Airlines will foot the bill for the \$65 million to \$70 million project, which also will include room for new concessions, waiting areas and rest rooms. The committee agreed to a 15-year lease of the 165,000-square-foot space at a cost to American of \$2.25 per square foot, with two five-year extensions at slightly more per square foot.

"We're very excited to be expanding this facility," said Billy Glunz, regional director of state and local government affairs for American Airlines. The new L concourse gates will be built to accommodate 75-seat Embraer 175 regional jets.

Addressing the ongoing controversy over O'Hare noise, Glunz said the 175 is "much quieter" than even a smaller regional jet.

He also said American Airlines has the youngest fleet in the industry, and its new jets are quieter and more fuel-efficient. He also noted that quieter Boeing 737 jets are replacing McDonnell Douglas MD-80s.

"When we finish with the summer, I think we'll see a significant drop in our MD-80 flying here in Chicago," Glunz said.

During the meeting, City Council members who sit on the committee asked for assurances that minority and women-owned business hiring goals would be met or exceeded for the project, which has been endorsed by the city's aviation department.

The city expects that once the gates are in operation, they will add \$500 million annually to the local economy. City officials also say the project should add 300 to 500 construction jobs over the next two years.

In backing the gate expansion earlier this year, Aviation Commissioner Ginger Evans said that passengers will see fewer delays and shorter taxi times. The new gates will be complete before Runway 9C-27C starts operations in 2020.

The gate plan will go to the full council next week, where it is expected to be approved.

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