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McCarran is out in front in accepting paperless boarding passes



Mobile check-in, in which travelers download a bar code that works as a boarding pass, is now an option for some travelers at McCarran International Airport.

By Brian Eckhouse
Mon, Mar 9, 2009 (2 a.m.)

Imagine you're rushing to catch your flight and you're not able to print out your boarding pass.

If you have an Internet-friendly smart phone or a personal digital assistant, some airlines allow you to download a bar code that serves as your boarding pass.

That service, called mobile check-in, is now an option for some travelers at McCarran.

Instead of presenting your printed boarding pass as you enter the screening area, you simply wave your phone or PDA past a scanner, which reads the bar code and displays your itinerary for Transportation Security Administration officers.

Some U.S. airports allow mobile check-in if a participating airline has a dedicated checkpoint. But only McCarran is equipped for mobile check-in for multiple carriers at the same checkpoint. The airport says it's helped create a standard for the industry.

"We don't want propriety ownership by an airline at a checkpoint," airport spokesman Chris Jones says. "We want common use."

Since Feb. 10, mobile check-in scanners have been stationed at the checkpoint to the D concourse.

McCarran plans to add the scanners at the checkpoints to the other concourses, but all participating carriers fly out of D.

Continental Airlines, Delta Air Lines and Northwest Airlines offer mobile check-in at McCarran. American Airlines will soon offer the service, possibly by the end of March, and three other carriers could be online by year's end, Jones says.

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The only thing dropping as fast as the passenger counts at McCarran International Airport are the airfares.

With two weeks' advance booking, round-trip flights between McCarran and New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport are as low as \$199.20 on JetBlue, \$215.20 on Virgin America.

Drops in airfare are to be expected: Fuel prices are half what they were in summer and demand is at its lowest through McCarran since just after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. (McCarran has suffered through 11 consecutive months of passenger declines. January had the largest drop, with 15.7 percent fewer passengers than January 2008).

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But some routes — such as Las Vegas to Reno — are not cheaper these days.

With two weeks' advance booking, the Reno round trip costs at least \$176 on United Airlines. Southwest Airlines charges \$191.20 — practically the same cost as the round trip to New York on JetBlue.

Reno is less than 400 miles from Las Vegas. New York is 2,500 miles away. What gives?

Analysts say demand for transcontinental flights typically is lower this time of year, so airfare tends to be cheaper. But with demand lower still this year and some airfare wars, prices are especially good.

Maybe the legislative session in Carson City is the reason behind the higher fares between Reno and Las Vegas. It cost about \$160 round-trip last March, when there was no session, says Rick Seaney, chief executive of FareCompare.com.

That kind of pricing can occur when there's little competition.

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Interstate 15 north of the Spaghetti Bowl continues to snake through ongoing construction that's pinched the freeway from three lanes each way to two, causing frequent bottlenecks.

There should be some relief on the northbound lanes next month, says Bob McKenzie, a spokesman for the Nevada Transportation Department.

By then, those two lanes will have wider shoulders, which transportation officials anticipate will thin traffic somewhat. (Then again, more traffic will spill onto these lanes in April, when the ramp from U.S. 95 onto I-15 reopens).

Ultimately, Interstate 15 between the Spaghetti Bowl and Craig Road will have four lanes in each direction. Officials expect the \$240 million expansion of I-15 to be completed on time in late 2010 — and on budget. The widening project began in 2007 and is funded with state and federal money.