



British Airways to Adopt N.Y. Biometric Screening

By Nicola Clark Published: August 31, 2006

British Airways said Thursday that it would sponsor a new biometric screening system this autumn at Terminal 7 of John F. Kennedy Airport in New York, enabling potentially thousands of trans-Atlantic travelers to significantly shorten their wait at security checkpoints.

The system, which replicates the Registered Traveler pilot program currently used by 27,000 air travelers at Orlando International Airport in Florida, allows passengers, for an annual fee of \$80, to breeze through airport security and immigration controls in exchange for providing certain personal information as well as fingerprint and iris scans.

"We hope that this gives our customers a more predictable and more convenient process through security," said Lisa Lam, a British Airways spokeswoman.

The biometric screening program is operated by Clear Registered Traveler, a unit of Verified Identity Pass, a company founded by the journalist and entrepreneur Steven Brill.

British Airways owns and operates the New York airport's Terminal 7, which serves eight other airlines, including All Nippon Airways of Japan, Qantas of Australia and United Airlines. Four million passengers pass through the terminal every year.

Applicants must provide two pieces of valid identification, have their fingerprints and irises digitally scanned and submit to a U.S. background check. If they pass, members receive a special identity card, which they can swipe as they pass through a designated checkpoint, where the wait is generally no more than a few minutes.

"We're delighted that British Airways has become the first airline to partner with us," Brill said.

Clear has signed agreements with airports in San Jose, California, Indianapolis and Cincinnati in the United States to operate similar registered traveler programs, which are expected to become operational by the end of the year, once authorization has been received from the U.S. Transportation Security Administration, Brill said. Clear is also working with the Canadian authorities to set up a program at Lester B. Pearson International Airport in Toronto.

Other companies, including Unysis and Saflink, are forming similar partnerships with other U.S. airports. A handful of biometric security screening programs are also operating in Europe: Amsterdam Schiphol Airport has offered membership in its Privium program to European Union citizens since 2001 and claims 30,000 members. Air France, the French flag carrier, says more than 5,000 frequent fliers have joined its Pégase program, which has been operational for about a year and is open to EU and Swiss citizens.

Brill said that U.S. regulations currently restricted registration for the British Airways and other Clear programs to U.S. citizens and permanent residents. But he said that Clear had approached the authorities in Britain and other countries about setting up similar programs, in the hope that future international agreements might allow registered travelers in one country to use their biometric passes abroad.

"We would be very much in favor of reciprocity," Brill said. "But right now, we're starting country by country."