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ON THE ROAD; Registered Traveler Program

Set to Go Beyond One Airport

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READY or not -- and some critics say not -- the long-delayed Registered Traveler program is moving forward, with the single existing operator planning a succession of openings soon at four airports, while a competitor says it is about to join in.

Verified Identity Pass Inc., which began the first Registered Traveler program at Orlando International Airport in July 2005, is planning to open its second site, in Terminal 7 at Kennedy International Airport, with a target date of Dec. 19, said Steven Brill, the chief executive of the company, which markets its version of the expedited security program under the name Clear.

He said the company, which has more than 30,000 members at Orlando, is processing applications with the Transportation Security Administration for Kennedy and for San Jose, Calif.; Cincinnati; and Indianapolis.

"We have about 3,000 non-Orlando people signed up so far," he said. "We've been sort of keeping it quiet because we find it much easier to talk about it once the lanes are open."

Late last month, Mr. Brill's program received certification from the security administration to begin rolling out at other airports. Mr. Brill said then that he expected Clear to be operating in 12 to 20 airports within 12 months.

In all, over the last six months, more than two dozen airports have expressed interest in the program. Many are now talking with Mr. Brill and several competitors about if, when and how to proceed.

The Unisys Corporation said yesterday that it was planning soon to introduce its own version of Registered Traveler, first at Reno/Tahoe International Airport in Nevada, where the company has a contract to start operating once the security administration approves.

"We are very much in the game," said Lawrence J. Zmuda, a Unisys partner working with the Homeland Security Department and the security administration to develop the program. "We are going to be rolling this out at several locations in the spring of 2007."

The Registered Traveler program provides identity cards, which include not only data on place of birth and home address but also fingerprints and iris scans. Travelers who pay an annual fee after passing a federal background check can then go through expedited security in special lanes. Clear charges \$99.95 a year, which includes a federal fee for the security clearances. Once the program expands, Registered Traveler identity cards will be interchangeable at various suppliers' lanes.

But what do you really get for the money besides a special lane? Critics of the program have questioned its customer service value and slow pace and have also asked whether it could open a security loophole for potential terrorists who are able to pass a background check.

The program's progress has been slower than anticipated, as the security administration carefully evaluates both the program itself and the various technologies it may employ to provide better benefits to members. In November 2005, Mr. Brill testified to Congress that once the government announced "a clear blueprint for benefits" to members, "we and our competitors would likely be rolled out at 30 to 40 of the 50 largest airports within six months."

Among other potential benefits that have been discussed are not having to remove shoes and coats, and not having to take laptops from their cases. The security administration continues to evaluate various technologies to address those issues, but so far hasn't approved any.

One system being evaluated was developed by GE Security in partnership with Mr. Brill's company. It uses explosives-detection technology to examine travelers' shoes as they step into the Clear kiosk where their biometric ID cards are verified.

Mr. Brill said that while the security administration has not yet given final approval for that system, it is in place for testing at Orlando and is being installed at Kennedy. And, he added, "We expect to be able to deploy at least the shoe scanner part as we open at each airport," including Kennedy when Clear starts operating there in two weeks.

Unisys already has contracts with most of the nation's airports to provide biometric-based security systems for workers in secure areas. .

"Shoes are everybody's No. 1 concern; laptops are No. 2 and outer garments are No. 3," said Mr. Brill, who predicted that technology dealing with laptops and coats would become available next year.

Mr. Zmuda said: "I think this is definitely going to be a decent business, one that's going to continually evolve, given that it is a security program as well as a customer service program."