

Columbus Int'l Installs System to Tighten Accountability & Efficiency of Ground Transportation Providers

BY KEN WYSOCKY



FACTS&FIGURES

Project: New Ground Transportation Management System

Location: John Glenn Columbus Int'l Airport (OH)

Approx. Cost: \$1 million

Funding: General airport revenue

Installation Timeline: Sept.-March 2019

2018 Airport Passenger Volume: 8.1 million

Commercial Transportation Operators: 250+

System Vendor: GateKeeper Systems Inc.

Technologies Employed: Geofences, transponders, radio frequency identification (RFID)

RFID Technology Vendor: Transcore

Electrical Contractor: Knight Electric Inc.

Fiber Optics Contractor: Gudenkauf Corp.

System Features: Onsite kiosk that allows taxi drivers to replenish their accounts for airport trip fees; digital signs that meter taxis from the holding lot one-by-one

Key Benefits: Revenue tracking/verification for pick-up & drop-off fees; more efficient paperless processes; automated billing for commercial transportation companies; more orderly & effective taxi dispatching from holding lot

A new \$1 million ground transportation management system is dramatically reducing paperwork and helping John Glenn Columbus International Airport (CMH) more accurately account for fees paid by ride-share services and commercial operators that pick up and drop off passengers at the terminal.

At the same time, the Ohio airport is enjoying more efficient and orderly taxi dispatching from the holding lot, which minimizes wait times for airport guests, reports Tracey Pomeroy, senior manager for parking and ground transportation at CMH.



TRACEY POMEROY

The project cost about \$1 million and was paid for with general airport revenue. The new system, from GateKeeper Systems Inc., took about six months to install and went online in March.

Pomeroy explains that two primary factors drove the need for change: a sharp increase in ride-sharing services, such as Uber and Lyft, during the last several years; and cumbersome

paperwork that bogged down everything from searching for report information to processing operating permits for taxis and other commercial operators.

Ride-sharing services posed an accountability problem because the vehicles are owned by individual contractors who aren't responsible for paying the \$4 pick-up and drop-off fees. As such, they didn't mesh with CMH's existing tracking system for taxis. Instead, the airport relied on ride-sharing companies to self-report the number of trips their drivers made into and out of the airport on a monthly basis, and the airport was unable to verify the numbers.

"We couldn't determine if the reports we received from transportation network (ride-sharing) providers were accurate," Pomeroy says.

"Nationwide, Uber and Lyft and others have taken significant amounts of passenger traffic from more traditional sources at airports," adds Lynn Richardson, chief executive officer



LYNN RICHARDSON



of GateKeeper. "As a result, airport curbsides don't work as intended...at Columbus, there was a management system already in place to track taxi fees, but not for ride-sharing services."

Ending the Paper Chase

Using a paper-based system slowed down administrative processes and made finding documents and getting them signed a time-consuming chore. "We needed to get rid of paper," Pomeroy observes. "We wanted a digital database that could store pertinent information for commercial operators instead of using paper files—for things like their insurance forms, vehicle information and other documentation.

"We spent a lot of time shuffling papers around," she continues. "Now, we can access everything right on a computer screen. GateKeeper hosts everything from all of our records to our taxi

dispatch system to the taxi-driver payment kiosk, where drivers pay their pick-up and drop-off fees."

It used to take one employee anywhere from five days to two or three months to issue a single permit to a commercial transportation provider. Delays were caused by various circumstances, such as operators not including key information on forms, not signing all the necessary documents or submitting unnotarized documents, explains Pomeroy.

"We have about 250 commercial operators—limousine services, courtesy vehicles, buses and so forth—and the operators don't always read directions carefully," she says. But electronic forms make the process much faster and more efficient.



WENDIE BIDWELL

"Increases in volume at airports, especially at Columbus, have presented a need for better ways to manage ground transportation," says Wendie Bidwell, a project manager at GateKeeper. "Most

airports have very manual processes on the back end that require a lot of people to keep track of what's going on. And there also are

safety concerns: Airports need to know who's on the property."

A customer portal allows transportation companies to see their accounts with the airport and automates formerly time-consuming processes. For example, if a limousine company gets a new phone number, now it can submit an electronic change request.

"Then, all the airport has to do is approve it electronically, rather than take a phone call, write the new number down on a piece of paper and hand key it in later," Richardson explains. "There's also a financial module that automates the process of billing and collecting fees, either by credit card or by electronic payments."

New Monitoring Capabilities

To track ride-share drivers, CMH established geofences—virtual geographic boundaries defined by GPS or radio frequency identification (RFID) technology.

The system ties into GPS technology on ride-share drivers' cellphones to detect and log whenever their vehicles pass a geofence boundary. While the GateKeeper system doesn't track the fees that ride-sharing companies owe each month, it gives CMH a record of how many times such vehicles enter and leave the airport.

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