

San Diego airport's mega Terminal 1 project gets some financial help from federal government



Rendering shows what the new Terminal 1 will look like once completed. It will eventually have 30 gates — 11 more than the existing facility. (San Diego International Airport)

By Lori Weisberg

San Diego International Airport learned Friday it was awarded a \$23.5 million federal grant to be used toward financing the replacement of the aging Terminal 1, a project that is currently under construction.

San Diego's grant was among dozens of infrastructure awards totaling \$187 million that were made to airports in 34 states, the Federal Aviation Administration announced.

The replacement of the 1960s-era Terminal 1 with a new 30-gate facility, along with planned airfield improvements and new roadways, is expected to cost \$3.4 billion — triple the cost of the \$1 billion redevelopment of Terminal 2 a decade earlier. It is the single biggest project ever undertaken by the San Diego County Regional Airport Authority.

The new grant is not the first one that the airport has received under President Joe Biden's \$1 trillion

infrastructure bill signed into law in 2021. To date, the airport has been awarded five separate grants totaling nearly \$147 million that have gone toward construction of the new terminal, as well as air-side improvements that include a second taxiway for San Diego's one-runway airport.

"Additional funding for Terminal 1 enhances the Authority's financial position and our ability to fund future projects to continue creating an exceptional airport experience for our community and the world," said Airport Authority spokesperson Nicole Hall.

In all, \$25 billion of Biden's infrastructure bill was set aside specifically for airport improvements such as terminal expansions and baggage system upgrades, as well as runway safety enhancements.

"Millions of people fly every day, and making sure passengers can get to and from their destinations safely, and with less stress, has been a priority for the Biden-Harris Administration," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. "The funding we're announcing today will help 91 airports make critical upgrades to improve travel and further modernize our aviation infrastructure."

In addition to adding 11 more gates, the Terminal 1 project will feature an expanded and much-improved lineup of food and retail concessions, a 5,200-space parking garage, and a baggage handling system that will be able to process up to 2,000 bags per hour during peak periods. Also part of the redevelopment is a new three-lane airport access road from Laurel Street and North Harbor Drive that airport planners say will remove 45,000 vehicle trips per day from Harbor Drive.

The first 19 gates in the new terminal, now under construction, are expected to open by late summer of next year. Demolition of the old terminal will immediately follow. The additional 11 gates should be ready by 2027.

Considerable progress has been made since construction first got under way in November 2021. The first phase of the new Terminal 1 facility is 65 percent complete, Hall said. Meanwhile, construction on stage 1 of the adjacent Terminal 1 Parking Plaza is 70 percent complete and is expected to open late this summer. The first phase will have 2,800 parking spaces. A second phase, with 2,400 additional spaces, is expected to open a year later.

San Diego's \$23.5 million award was the second highest among all the grants announced Friday. Leading the list is Detroit's Metropolitan Wayne County Airport, which received \$61.8 million to help fund the rehabilitation of an existing on-airport roadway that would provide better access for aircraft rescue firefighting trucks, airport vehicles, and ground service equipment to safely operate.