

# KEY WEST'S EXPANSION DRIVE

"Island Paradise" Airport Will See New Gates, Expanded Concessions

BY SARAH BELING



**Above:** With traveler numbers on the rise, Key West International Airport is expanding to meet rising demand. It's also modernizing with the addition of passenger boarding bridges, eliminating the tarmac boarding that has characterized operations in the past.

**T**ravelers flying through sunny Key West, Florida, will soon have a bright new concourse to experience, as work progresses on **Key West International Airport (EYW)**'s Concourse A expansion project.

The renovation broke ground in November 2022 and completed facilities are set to open in 2025, with final completion slated for 2026. The project includes a 48,802-square-foot concourse with eight new gates, new restrooms, a new rental car facility, a new baggage claim, a new security area, new support areas, hold rooms, retail and concessions. The \$119 million project

receives 28% of its funding from municipal bonds, with the remainder financed by a combination of federal and state grants coupled with passenger facility charge receipts.

The large-scale upgrades are a direct result of EYW's massive passenger growth, says Katie Atkins, the airport's marketing and communications manager, who notes that the need for expanded facilities first identified by their team in 2019 has only increased in the years since. "Last year, more than 1.4 million passengers used Key West International Airport, which has seen significant growth in enplanements and is

currently exceeding pre-pandemic traffic levels, supported by Key West’s status as a well-anchored tourist destination,” says Atkins, adding that EYW has also seen nearly 500,000 passengers pass through the airport in the first quarter of 2024 alone.

In order to support the region’s increased tourism, the EYW team is future-proofing the facility not only for increased capacity, but for sustainability, as they raise the concourse above flood-level.

For the teams at **McFarland Johnson** and **NV2A**, responsible for the facility’s design and construction, replacing the airport’s aging infrastructure is key to making EYW a safer, more efficient and inclusive facility, says Christopher Kopic, regional director of facilities at McFarland Johnson.

“Our team is committed to bringing to life a landmark project that seamlessly integrates functionality, sustainability, and leads the way to the future, while preserving the unique spirit of Key West from the very first moment visitors arrive in this paradise,” adds Luis Ardit-Rocha,

NV2A Gulf Keystar JV program director. Having consulted local disabilities groups on needed accessibility measures, EYW’s new concourse facilities will include a visual public address system and mother’s rooms. Additionally, the team is focused on improving energy efficiency. They are installing new dehumidification systems and energy metering equipment, and predict that the facility will use 26% less energy than its calculated building baseline.

Seasoned EYW passengers will also recognize the airport’s most significant change: the installment of passenger boarding bridges, a stark departure from the airport’s “throwback” practice of requiring passengers to board via the tarmac. “This will eliminate the risks of passengers walking to aircraft on an active parking

apron subject to wind, weather, aircraft noise, and ground support equipment,” says Kopec.

Asked whether EYW travelers will miss the airport’s unique boarding system, Atkins notes that it is “a concern we hear from a sector of our passengers who just don’t want to let go of that rain-or-shine hot air on their

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face upon landing in Key West.” But mostly, she says, people are supportive of the new approach. While convenient, the move to jet bridges will also add greater operational efficiency and reliability for passengers.

Not all the changes at EYW are purely practical, adds Atkins. “We are really excited about a feature dubbed the ‘Virtual Reality Tunnel’ set to feature real footage of our underwater island surroundings,” she says, noting that it enhances “the modern Key West aesthetic we’re aiming for.”

## Concessions Upgrade

Passengers will also be able to enjoy an expanded concessions and retail program in Concourse A, says Atkins. Joining the current lineup are popular American cuisine from Chili’s, Maestro Della Pizza pies, the Farm 2Air Market grab-and-go market, Cuban Corner coffee, breakfast items from the Great American Bagel Bakery and curated beverages from the First Call Beach Bar and Southern Point bar — all set to be operated by **Master ConcessionAir**, which currently manages EYW’s Last Call Beach Bar and Conch Flyer Grill and Bar.

**Below:** The new Concourse A includes eight gates, new concessions, restrooms and security checkpoint, and other amenities.



## LATEST BUZZ

“We have worked closely with the airport staff to create a balanced mix of national brands, such as Chili’s and Starbucks, as well as a locally inspired marketplace and a longtime favorite in The Conch Flyer Grill and Bar. We will also be opening Maestro Della Pizza, which offers an artisanal pizza experience, and First Call Bar, which will have a variety of locally inspired cocktails,” says MasterConcessionAir CEO Peter Amaro Jr., The company is “very excited to deliver this fresh new vibrant experience to the Key West Airport traveler,” he says.

For the team at EYW, keeping a local feel to retail and concessions is paramount, says Atkins, noting that they “have always appreciated our local in-house businesses, as they are able to deliver that Key West charm that can’t be found anywhere else.”

And if EYW’s recent passenger numbers are any indication, there are many fans of Key West’s charm. Atkins and the EYW team hope that the airport’s latest improvements spell increased revenue for the region as major airline carriers like **American Airlines**, **United Airlines**, **Delta Air Lines**, **JetBlue** and regional operator **Silver Airways** continue to expand their services to the airport. She adds that a new Concourse A “will improve efficiency for staff and passengers alike, especially with the increase in demand to visit our island paradise. A simple and intuitive layout will be easy to navigate combined with engaging design elements to ensure passengers have a stress-free airport experience,” a philosophy that EYW Executive Director Richard Strickland echoed.

“Concourse A represents a critical step forward at Key West International Airport,” says Strickland. “The spacious and modern building will provide state-of-the-art technology, ensuring a durable and energy-efficient structure that will last for decades to come. It has been designed to meet travel demands and create a positive experience for our new and returning passengers. It is a testament to the airport’s ambition to embrace the future and soar to new heights.”



**Above:** First Call Beach Bar and Southern Point bar are two of several new concepts to be operated by Master ConcessionAir once the new concourse opens next year.

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