Delta Paid for Its Own Security Upgrade and Solved All its Problems

The security lines at the Atlanta airport had grown progressively worse. The lines grew longer, the crowds ever more unruly, the invasiveness of the process ever more intense, the mood of the TSA more crabby and scary. Customers were miserable. It had been getting more terrible all the time, unsustainably so.

Those of us who use this airport routinely even started using awkward hacks. I would ask Uber drivers to drop me off at the international terminal, which is vastly better because fewer people are there. Then I would ride the tram back to the main terminal. It made no sense but for the fact that the main terminal would often delay the trip by up to a full hour.

Finally, last year, faced with the serious problem of missed flights, angry customers, and mangled scheduling, Delta airlines decided to do something about a problem that was technically not theirs. The government runs airport security and taxpayers foot the bill. Delta made the decision that this was not going to work for them. In their own interest, they decided to take a different direction.

They persuaded the TSA to let them pay for a new system. They shelled out $4 million for new staff and $1 million for a new system for screening and scanning. Again, Delta paid for everything!

The results: pure magic! I've now been through the new system five times and each time it has been smooth and quick. Delta speculated that the new system would improve efficiency by 20-30%. My experience suggests that it is closer to 90%.

"At the end of the day, it's a hassle for us if our customers' travel plans get disrupted because they're stuck at security," a Delta spokesman [told](#) the New York Times last year. "We end up spending time and money to rebook them and want more control over the security process."

In the past, every passenger had to stand in a line and grab bins one at a time and push them through the conveying belt. As Delta experts looked at the situation, they realized that this was the source of the hold up.

Fives Lines from One

And why? As soon as I tell you, you will see. It meant that every person had to wait for the slowest person in the line to finish. Even if only one person in 10 is slow, the entire experience slowed down for everyone.

The new system allows five at a time to put their things in bins that are on an automatic roller. You put your things in and push the bin forward onto the automatic roller. The bins return automatically so that employees don't have to fuss with them.

It is the equivalent of turning one line into five lines. Incredibly, this one change dramatically changed the process from mind-numbingly slow to very fast and efficient.

There are more benefits aside from the pure efficiency. I've noticed that TSA employees themselves are in a better mood these days. And the passengers too. They actually have smiles on their faces! That's better for everyone.

Think of it. After 9/11, Congress created a new system that took responsibility for security away from private enterprise and gave it over to government completely. What could go wrong? Absolutely everything. In fact, I wrote as much at the time.

Everything about the history of humanity suggests that something fully controlled by government is going to go wrong, but in a moment of panic, Congress decided to forget all lessons of history and do something spectacularly stupid.

In the years that have passed, there have been few greater annoyances than airport security (well, that and taxes). But now we see how a system evolves. Private enterprise decided to throw itself into the mix, take a risk at innovating, and voilá! it worked. Now, with just an added element of private creativity added, the system has become vastly better.

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Is this a kind of surreptitious privatization? In a word, yes. It is happening without legislation and without big headlines. But it is vastly improving the lives of millions.

If you don't have this at your airport yet, give it time. It is coming. Airport security just can't continue as it is. There is one possible solution already beginning. As usual, private enterprise will fix what government cannot do.

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