BDL’s Murphy Terminal
Making Way For Transportation Center

By Connor Relyea

A copper-fabricated box containing an assortment of items, including a 1951 airport directory, a letter from the architect of the terminal, Connecticut aviation laws and regulations and a picture of then-Gov. John Davis Lodge, was pulled from the cornerstone of the old Murphy Terminal at Bradley International (BDL) in Connecticut in December. The unveiling of this 63-year-old time capsule was the symbolic beginning of demolition on the terminal.

“It was a nice ceremony to commemorate the value that the building brought to the airport,” says Kevin Dillon, executive director and CEO of the Connecticut Airport Authority.

After opening to the public in 1952, the Murphy Terminal served the Hartford, Conn., area for 58 years before being closed to airline use in 2010. At the time of its closing, the Murphy Terminal was the oldest operating passenger terminal in the country. When in operation, the Murphy Terminal helped to serve the 6 million passengers BDL sees annually and also acted as the filming location for the 2009 Robert De Niro film “Everybody’s Fine.” After the terminal closed, its space was used to house the administrative offices of the Transportation Security Administration and the state police.

But growth in demand prompted BDL officials to begin the demolition late last year to make way for new facilities. Taking the place of the Murphy Terminal will be a new transportation center that will house rental car agencies, public parking and a transit center. A portion of the terminal also will be preserved as a framework for a new terminal, if and when demand warrants.

Oz Griebel, president and CEO of MetroHartford Alliance, a business and economic development organization, says the foresight of early developers has made the current transition easier.

“Having airports the size of Bradley in this day and age, had it not already acquired the footprint, would be very difficult in the Northeast, where you’ve got such a dense
population," he says. "We are very fortunate the actions were taken in the ’40s and ’50s to acquire and develop that land."

Enabling New Development

In 2014, the CAA put together a $19 million contract for demolition of the Murphy Terminal. Of that $19 million, $7 million will be used to complete roadwork, including refurbishing the two-level roadway that ran in front of the terminal and realigning the roadway that connected Terminal B with Terminal A. The roadwork will free the site for construction and future expansion, according to Dillon.

“There is a lot of work that needs to happen on an enabling basis beyond the terminal demolition before we can progress into the construction of the transportation center,” says Dillon.

Actual demolition of the terminal didn’t begin until this year because of environmental litigation. Dillon says that during the time the terminal was constructed, there was a significant use of asbestos and other hazardous materials including PCB in the caulk to seal the doors and windows of the terminal, so crews have been working to remove those materials.

“We’re not in a situation where you do one of these explosions or you simply knock the building down,” says Dillon. “It’s more dismantling the building.”

The building is on schedule to be down by the end of the year. Dillon says the CAA hopes construction on the new transportation center will begin in 2017, with a two-year completion timeframe.

The new transportation center will be mainly a partnership between three rental car agencies – Hertz, Avis Rent A Car and National Car Rental – and the airport. Currently, the rental car agencies are spread across airport grounds, and passengers have to take buses to get to individual agencies.

“It’s a great customer service improvement project,” says Dillon. “This new facility will be directly connected to Terminal A by a climate-controlled moving walkway and will ultimately be connected to the new terminal in the future. No folks will have to get on a bus to get to their rental car.”

Dillon also says the CAA is working with the neighboring municipalities, such as Hartford and Windsor Locks, Conn., and Springfield, Mass., to enhance ground transportation to and from the airport and process an increase in traffic of regional bus service. Perhaps the most important part of the new transit component of the center is the rail service, which will process rail passengers from the Amtrak line in New Haven, Conn., from Springfield. This increased service will take the place of a high-frequency bus service running between the station and the airport.

The conceptual budget for construction of the new transportation center is $250 million, though this number is subject to change after the CAA gets a design element in place.

Along with the new transportation facility, a portion of the old Murphy Terminal is remaining at the site in preparation for a possible new terminal, although Dillon says an expansion isn’t expected until 2025. BDL saw a healthy passenger growth of 8.5 percent last year and another 4 percent this year, according to Dillon, and there is room for more to come.

“We are positioned very well geographically where we have an extensive population base in our market area,” says Dillon. “The potential for growth beyond the 6 million passengers that we handled last year is considerable.”

We’d like to hear your opinion about this article. Please direct all correspondence to Carol Ward at carol@airportrevenuemag.com.