Changi to review flight timings

Study on to boost airport’s hub status by making flight transfers easier

BY KARAMJITKAUR
Aviation Correspondent

CHANGI Airport will review its flight schedules to see how timings can be adjusted to make it easier for passengers to transfer from one airline to another.

Experts say this is a good way for a hub airport to boost its traffic — and its income — without having to add new flights or bring in new airlines.

They add that it is also a way for Changi to rise in its role as matchmaker for airlines seeking partnerships.

This is the first time the airport — which turned 25 on July 1 — will hire consultants to undertake such an exercise, The Straits Times understands.

Changi serves 82 airlines, which operate more than 4,100 flights a week connecting Singapore to more than 180 cities in 57 countries.

Of the 30 million passengers handled in 2004, over five million, or about 17 per cent, were either in transit or transfer.

Passengers in transit are those who continue their journey with the same carriers; transfer passengers are those who change airlines.

Mr Peter Harbison, the executive chairman of the Sydney-based consultant, Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation, said of adjustments to flight schedules: “This sort of tweaking can be very valuable if done correctly.

“Airlines do not talk to each other. They fix their schedules to fit themselves and not other airlines.”

Airports with their bird’s-eye view are therefore best placed to make it more conducive for airlines to work jointly towards building efficient flight schedules.

It is a complicated process, Mr Harbison said, because it is not a simple matter of just changing a flight time and telling an airline it has to comply.

He said: “There is also the entire network to consider because a change here can also affect the airline’s schedules at other airports.”

Assistant Professor Terence Fan, from the Singapore Management University’s Lee Kong Chian School of Business, suggested that one area to focus on was peak-hour traffic.

He said: “If more flights can come in during peak hours — even if it’s just one or two squeezed in per hour — it would provide more opportunities for passengers to do transfers.”

But more frequent take-offs and landings, resulting in shorter intervals between them, would of course present safety implications which need to be carefully studied, he said.

A plane takes off or lands every two and a half minutes at Changi on average.

The experts say Changi Airport has to be on its toes to stay ahead.

Competition is already nipping at its heels from the airports in the region, such as Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok and Dubai, which are also fighting for hub status.

karam@sph.com.sg