ARRIVING SOON AT CHANGI: T4

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LESS than two months after Changi Airport welcomed T3 to its fold, plans to build a new terminal, T4, are already in the works.

A $10-million upgrade of the Budget Terminal also starts in July, after last month’s announcement of a $500-million makeover for Terminal 1. These plans are part of the Transport Ministry’s strategy for Changi Airport to stay ahead of its rivals, such as those in Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong and Dubai.

“It is critical ... that we take decisive steps to strengthen Changi’s position as a leading air hub in the region,” said Minister of State for Transport Lim Hwee Hua in Parliament yesterday.

She revealed that master planning for Terminal 4 (T4) had started but did not say more.

Aviation analysts told TODAY the development of a new passenger terminal could take 20 years. The Singapore Management University’s assistant professor Terence Fan said this “would be trickier” than developing T3 had been.

“The major arterial road accessing the passenger terminals is already flanked on all three sides by the terminals,” he said. The “vast amount” of reclaimed land to the east of the airport could be a site for expansion.

By early next year, the Budget Terminal will be expanded from its capacity of 2.7 million passengers per annum to 7 million.

Government Parliamentary Committee chairman for transport Cedric Foo urged airport managers here to pay attention to details and make travel into Singapore “frictionless and seamless”.

In light of ultra-long-haul planes being developed, MP Lam Pin Min asked if Changi’s strength of high connectivity as a transit hub would become irrelevant.

Ms Lim assured the House that her ministry would continue its efforts to enhance Singapore’s air hub status. Even as two airlines left Changi’s fold last year, the Government will continue to reduce costs and provide incentives for them to grow their traffic out of Changi, through the Air Hub Development Fund.

The Government will continue to pursue air services liberalisation, said Ms Lim. Last year, Air Services Agreements with 18 countries, including Open Skies Agreements with five countries, were expanded.

The opening up of the Singapore-Kuala Lumpur route to the low-cost airlines last month was a result of the bilateral air services consultations last year, she said.

Last year, low-cost carriers contributed 3.6 million or around 10 per cent of Changi’s passenger traffic, and half its overall traffic growth. Further growth could be on the cards as Asean members have set a goal of lifting flight restrictions between capital cities this year.

To keep ahead of this, the Budget Terminal will be expanded, from its capacity of 2.7 million passengers per annum to 7 million passengers. Work will start in July and is expected to be completed by early next year. There will be more check-in counters, boarding gates and baggage handling equipment.

Apart from paying attention to hardware, Changi is also mindful of the software aspects of customer service, said Ms Lim.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore has been regularly monitoring key performance indicators such as the amount of time passengers would need to clear immigration, security screening, and collect their baggage. And Changi Airport has been meeting the targets set, she said.