

Longmont Times-Call editorial

Investment in airports key to future

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For many distant travelers, their first in-person glimpse of Colorado comes at Denver International Airport. The airport's cleanliness, efficiency and services, and the friendliness of the staff create the first impression these visitors have of Denver and of our state. For those on a layover, it is the only impression.

Good thing, then, that DIA scored high in the 2013 World Airport Awards, placing 36th among the top 100 airports globally. The awards, given by Skytrax and based on surveys of 12.1 million travelers of 108 nationalities, placed the Denver airport third among North American airports. Vancouver's International Airport and Cincinnati's Northern Kentucky International airport ranked higher.

For a complete list of airport rankings and the methods used in the survey, go to worldairportawards.com. The ASCE report on travel infrastructure can be found at <http://bit.ly/Q5Ygyj>.

San Francisco's and Atlanta's Hartsfield airports also placed among the top 50. No U.S. airport was in the top 25.

The awards cover more than 395 airports worldwide and, according to the Skytrax consulting group, evaluate traveler experiences across 39 indicators. Those include ease of access to the airport, public transportation options and price, terminal comfort and cleanliness, immigration waiting times and staff attitude, security waits and courtesy, overall friendliness of airport staff and customer perception of security.

According to the survey, the best U.S. airports, in general, did not fare as well as those in Europe and Asia for customer satisfaction. This is a concern, because the survey reflects the first impression that tourists and business travelers have of the United States. Further, it reflects a continued lack of investment in infrastructure across the nation.

Such investments, particularly investments in airports, pay off. A 2012 report by the American Society of Civil Engineers -- while not related to travel experience -- noted that increased airport congestion creates a drag on the U.S. economy, limiting the nation's competitiveness and costing jobs.

But the inefficiency of aging airports, as revealed in the Skytrax survey, is a symptom of the larger problem. If our nation intends to invest in its future, its airports are good place to start.