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## Avoiding pit stops in Amsterdam

By ADAM SMITH

Want to spend a few hours in London, Frankfurt or Amsterdam on your next vacation or business trip? Then fly to Mumbai from Boston's Logan International Airport.

As anyone who has made the trip knows, it can be a 20-hour test of patience that involves cramped seating and waiting around in European airports for flight connections.

But hope is on the way.

In the next few years, Logan Airport could offer direct trips to major cities in India, shaving hours off transport time and eliminating the hassle of catching connecting flights. A combination of factors that could make the flights possible include a new incentive package for airlines offered by Logan, a newly developed aircraft by Boeing and an already steady demand.

Unlike other major U.S. cities such as New York or Chicago, Boston currently offers no direct flights to Asia. Nor can passengers fly directly from Logan to Central or South America, Africa or the Middle East.

To attract airlines to offer direct trips to these locations, the Massachusetts Port Authority, or Massport, in February began an incentive program for interested carriers. The program would offer airlines that introduce new direct routes discounts on landing fees (75 percent off the first year and 25 percent the second year) as well as financial assistance worth upwards of \$200,000 for print, billboard and radio advertisements. Depending on aircraft size, the landing fee savings for an airline for the first year alone could be up to \$500,000.

Massport officials are careful to avoid the perception that the program would "subsidize" airlines. Rather, they say, it would level the playing field.

"We decided that in order to compete with every other international airport, who are offering financial incentives to airlines, in order to be on the same level playing field, we need to offer something," said Yil Surehan, manager of airline route development at Massport.



**Buckle up and get ready to ... wait because direct flights to India from Logan International Airport in Boston are still years away, say airport officials.**

The demand for direct flights from the Hub to India is strong. In 2006, around 70,000 people made the roundabout trip between Boston and India.

But the demand is not strong enough for airlines to frequently fly jumbo jets like the 747 – which can hold around 400 people – from Logan to South Asia or other such faraway destinations, especially with soaring fuel prices.

"We just don't have the numbers to fill that size of aircraft," said Surehan.

An ideal aircraft for such trips departing from a mid-sized airport like Logan, said Surehan, is the Boeing 787

### Logan's runways too short

whose seating capacity starts at 210 people.

**Logan's longest runway is just 10,000 feet — far shorter than John F. Kennedy International Airport's 14,572-foot runways. This means that a 747 flying to Asia from Logan would be subject to weight restrictions, likely meaning fewer passengers and thus lower profits. This is another reason why airlines won't make the trips on 747s.**

"It's the right size and it can profitably serve these markets," he said of the 787.

900 Boeing 787 jets. In 2005, Air India pre-purchased 27 aircraft,

though it's not clear where the jets will be used. The airlines agree. According to a list of Boeing 787 customers, 57 carriers have already purchased nearly

But there is a catch. Boeing, which has already delayed production of the jets, isn't yet ready to put the 787 on the market and won't likely do so until late 2009, according to a spokesperson for the manufacturer. Also, during that year, Boeing only expects to have about 25 aircraft ready for sale, pushing the wait back to sometime in 2010 or later for most customers.

Still, Surehan is optimistic that within the next several years, the long-awaited direct flights from Boston to Indian cities like Delhi and Mumbai will become a reality, and not just a layover daydream.

"Given the environment right now — it's not the best time for the airline industry given the recession and record high fuel costs — but based on my discussions with carriers, we're hoping to get direct service ... within the next couple years and then nonstop service a couple of years later," he said.

Logan has already won interest for direct flights to China. Last month, Hainan Airline Aviation Group applied to the Chinese government for permission to fly daily, nonstop flights from Beijing to Boston using the Boeing 787 jets.

As for direct routes to India, things haven't been as fruitful. Cathay Pacific, a Hong Kong-based airline that recently expanded its flights to Mumbai and Delhi, has no plans to fly out of Logan, though it does offer trips from New York, said a spokesperson. American Airlines and Air India, both of which provide flights to India, did not respond to press inquiries for this story about their plans.

Still, Surehan said that he has "been in discussion with a few India carriers," though he declined to name specific airlines.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I was just in India three weeks ago talking with airlines about the opportunity to serve Boston."

### Boston to India — on Finnair?

According to a Finnair spokesperson, the airline is not aware of Logan's incentive program because the carrier offers services via Helsinki. But the airline is profiting from flights to India. During the month of March, Finnair flew a total of 107,760 people to and from Asia, including India. (It's flights from Boston are seasonal.)

"India is a very important market to Finnair especially to and from Europe, but the demand to and from North America is increasing rapidly," said Christina Colliander, the airline's director of sales for North America, in an e-mail. "The increased traffic on Finnair's Mumbai and Delhi routes clearly fuels our company's traffic growth."

Finnair began offering the trips to India in the summer of 2006.