

Talks under way to inject more money into aviation fund

More than half current sum spent on automation, improving work process

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SINGAPORE is set to renew a multi-million-dollar fund that has helped cement the country's status as a premier hub for intra-Asian and global air travel.

Talks are under way with key stakeholders to keep the funding going when the Aviation Development Fund (ADF) expires in March, said the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore (CAAS).

Over the past four years, more than \$50 million from the \$100 million fund has been spent.

But how much to put into the new fund has yet to be decided, CAAS director of aviation industry, Mr Daniel Ng, told *The Straits Times*.

"Overall, the fund has contributed to enhancing Singapore as an aviation hub of choice" and discussions are on with key stakeholders on how it can better support their needs and requirements, he said.

The move is to ensure rival airports in the region, already nipping at Changi's heels, do not get any opportunity to snatch away business due to Singapore.

When launched in 2010, the ADF was given \$100 million by the Government.

More than half the sum has been pumped into projects that have benefited travellers, airlines, ground handlers and other agencies and firms based at the airport.

These include the introduction of self-service options by

low-cost carriers Tigerair, Scoot and Jetstar for their passengers to check in.

At Terminal 1, for example, Jetstar passengers can use do-it-yourself kiosks to check in and print their baggage tags. They then drop their bags off at designated counters before moving to immigration.



The fund has so far gone to projects that benefit airlines, passengers and other airport-related operations such as self-service options (below) for passengers on low-cost carriers to check in. PHOTOS: MARK CHEONG, ST FILE

“ RAISING PRODUCTIVITY

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Another innovation the fund supported is an initiative that allows ground handler Sats to better handle time- and temperature-sensitive pharmaceuticals.

SIA Engineering used an \$80,000 grant to introduce wireless headsets for engineers on the ground to communicate with pilots in the cockpit before take-off.

These replaced wired headsets attached to the plane, which restricted the engineers' movements and made it difficult for them to communicate with other workers on the ground.

Airport operator Changi Airport Group (CAG) is also working closely with CAAS to raise productivity, said Mr Jayson Goh, CAG's senior vice-president for airport operations management.

These efforts include self-service check-in and self-service boarding of aircraft, in which travellers scan their boarding passes instead of relying on the airline's

staff to do it. Such automation raises productivity, makes better use of manpower, and reduces costs in the long run, said Mr Goh.

As passenger traffic grows amid an ageing workforce and tight labour market, Changi foresees today's productivity initiatives providing the solution for tomorrow's challenges, he added.

When Changi Airport's T4 is ready and T1 expanded by 2018, the airport will be able to handle up to 85 million passengers, a sharp rise from the current 66 million.

As costs go up, the need to boost service levels and productivity cannot be overemphasised, said Sats' president and chief executive officer Alex Hungate.

"Innovation is key. Self-check-in for passengers, driverless vehicles and the use of robotics in our kitchens all feature in our plans," he said.

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