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GETTING AROUND

Skycaps expand beyond the curb

O'Hare lot now has check-in service

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Getting Around

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There's a new option for travelers to park their bags at O'Hare International Airport.

For an extra fee, passengers who drive to the airport and park in the economy lots can check in baggage and receive their airline seat assignments and boarding passes at a staffed kiosk in Parking Lot E, on Coleman Drive.

Passengers then can board the free airport transit system, or People Mover, in Lot E, ride to the terminals and go directly to security checkpoints and aircraft gates, the Chicago Department of Aviation said.

It is recommended that passengers use the service park in Lot E, but if it is full, they can ride a free shuttle bus from the other economy lots to Lot E.

O'Hare officials hope the remote skycap service at Lot E will get passengers on their way quicker and help reduce long lines that form at airline ticket counters.

But it does compete against the curbside skycap service operated by most airlines outside the terminals.

The remote skycap service, which charges \$5 per bag, is available on domestic flights only that are operated by American Airlines, United Airlines, Continental Airlines, Delta Airlines and Alaska Airlines. Many airlines charge for curbside skycap service.

American requires passengers to check their bags at least 90 minutes before departure, while the other airlines require a minimum of 45 minutes before flights are scheduled to depart.

However, the Aviation Department recommends that passengers check in their bags at least two hours before the scheduled departure time to ensure that bags make it onto planes.

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The service is operated by Orlando-based Baggage Airline Guest Services Inc., in cooperation with the five airlines and the Transportation Security Administration, said O'Hare spokeswoman Wendy Abrams.

Trucks transport baggage in locked compartments from Lot E to the airline terminals, where the bags are screened under the normal protocol by the security agency, officials said. Employees of the baggage service have undergone FBI background checks.

A similar remote skycap service to O'Hare has been operating at McCormick Place since March.

The service will be expanded from McCormick Place to Midway Airport next year and eventually to both airports from hotels and other convention and meeting facilities in the Chicago area, Abrams said.

It remains to be seen whether the remote-skycap service, available in several dozen U.S. cities, catches on at O'Hare.

Many passengers traveling on domestic flights check in an hour or less before their departure. While more people are checking bags these days due to recent restrictions on carry-on bags containing liquids and gels, some travelers might not feel comfortable leaving their bags in a parking lot, especially so close to flight time.

For families traveling together, it might make more sense financially for one person to drop off the group and their luggage at the airline terminal, then drive to a remote parking lot and ride the People Mover back.

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