

NEW GENERATION NORTHERN EUROPEAN HUB FOR TRAFFIC, BUSINESS, AND TOURISM - RIGA AIRPORT

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Baltic gateway, Riga Airport, every single project is aiming quite clear goal - to create a progressive airport city of the future providing not only traditional aviation services, but also creating an environment for the development of various businesses, offering multi-modal transport connections, and contributing to the residents and the economy of the region. Riga Aviation Forum 2023 was the opportunity to meet with Laila Odina, CEO of Riga International Airport and get her answers to so many questions we have.

T.O.I am following what is happening in Riga Airport. You are now involved in so many innovation projects. You are the leading hub in Baltic states; can you tell us how are you dealing with so many innovative projects?

L.O. We have three main projects right now – the extension of airport terminal, we are building the new one. The second one is Rail Baltica: we are not financing it, we are not building it, but we are very much involved with, because we have to integrate it in the airport infrastructure. The third biggest project is RIX airport city – the city which is not only for people who are travelling, but for

people who just want to spend some with their kids, watch airplanes, time sitting in the cafes in the area. This one target audience. One more target audience for this project are businesspeople coming to use facilities which will be built for them such as conference centers, hotels, offices, logistic centers etc. Our offices of airport administration where we are now are old enough, so we are looking forward to having our new offices at RIX airport city. We offered local Marupes district municipality to also have their offices in future airport city. They can use this opportunity and bring some changes.

T.O. Obvious question – in France aviation is pointed out as a bad industry. So, we have a lot of issues, some politicians are even saying kids should stop dreaming of aviation. I guess RIX Airport City will be the place for dreamers perfect to get future workforce for the airport?

L.O. Yes, definitely! RIX Airport city will be the place where you can learn about aviation, where you can see planes. Little boys and girls like to do it. And also, not only little ones. We already have a place for spotters on the other side of the runway. This will be the perfect place for the future, this project could be a perfect place to motivate and stimulate the interest in aviation.

T.O. I was discussing with your communication team, I hope next week we will share a brilliant video we've just witnessed – the development, a vision of new terminal and the integration of Rail Baltica station. In your opinion, what will be the impact of this cooperation between rail transportation and Riga Airport? Will it bring changes in passenger traffic, how it will impact the airport growth?

L.O. The timeline of this project is important, how we plan to finish it. Both projects – Rail Baltica and the new airport terminal will be finished at the same time. So, there will be a connection. Bridges and tunnels will take to the terminal. It is really important for us to have this integration into our infrastructure to ensure seamless travel for passengers. We are looking forward to seeing passenger traffic growing with the integration of rail travel bringing them to the airport. We need to use new technologies to allow baggage check-in for this intermodal travel.

T.O. So you will do everything possible to make passengers comfortable using this multimodal travel way. One of things I wanted ask you for sure – Riga airport got involved in hydrogen testing project. Few of airports are trying something like this at this moment. Riga again is innovating.

L.O. Riga Airport indeed is participating in innovation projects, one of main reasons – the goal to reduce CO2 emissions produced by our heavy machinery. At the moment we don't have solutions replacing this heavy machinery. But when it comes to passenger transportation, there are some. Next week we will have trials with hydrogen bus. We will see passengers' reaction. This is only one day trial, but it will show us a lot. We will be able to compare its efficiency to the current fuel-based transport we have. And we will also be able to compare with electrical busses. I think it is important to see all that. Experts are saying that hydrogen could be efficient for short distances, let's see.

T.O. We hope to be among the first to have detailed information about this trial! My last question is quite obvious – what do you expect, what do you hope to achieve in 2024?

L.O. Next year we will see more passengers for sure! According to our forecast is plus 10%, 7,4 million passengers, which is close to what we had back in 2019. It is a sign of pretty full recovery. We have new destinations to be offered with airBaltic, Norwegian is coming and setting up a base; Ryanair is here and flying. We have some more operators interested to come to Riga airport. We

hope that all projects we are now implementing will bring good results.

We are looking forward to meet again for Riga Aviation Forum 2024 and update our discussion!



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