

Airports set to install e-gates for Aadhaar-based travel from 2018

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The civil aviation ministry has chosen Aadhaar as the digital identity needed for paperless airport entry and major Indian airports are expected to install e-gates to allow Aadhaar-based travel from next year, a senior government official said.

At present, passengers have to show printed or mobile air tickets and a government identity card to enter airports. Under the new system, airport entry would be based on biometrics.

By January-end, the aviation ministry is expected to complete the process of creating a template document for instituting an Aadhaar-based system at airports, approved by security agencies, civil aviation secretary Rajiv Nayan Choubey, who has been pushing the project, said in an interview.

Airports will then be allowed to adopt biometric readers and other technology

vendors to implement the system.

A database that talks freely between the stakeholders—airports, airlines and Aadhaar authorities—is already being worked out, he added.

“I would say from winter 2018 many of the major airports will be in a position to offer this service,” Choubey said.

Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Cochin airports and the state-owned Airports Authority of India (which runs over 100 airports) have shown interest in moving to the new system which would not only save costs but also improve their security architecture.

A lesser known benefit of introducing Aadhaar-based airport entry will be capacity augmentation. Airports at Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, Goa, Lucknow and Kozhikode are among the worst-hit by congestion, with air traffic growing in double digits and expected to touch about 115-20 million in 2017.

Studies conducted at Bengaluru airport have shown

that within the same time period, more people are able to pass through e-gates at airports compared to gates that have manual checking, which results in increased capacity and reduced congestion, *Mint* reported on 4 May.

The Aadhaar-based process enables a passenger to be verified in under five seconds at every checkpoint right up to the boarding gate, completing the screening process in 10 minutes, compared with the average 25 minutes it takes at present, the studies showed. Reduced airport gate manpower and no check-in counters will also help save costs.

To be sure, according to Choubey, the airports will continue to have manual gates for passengers who do not want to go through the Aadhaar-based process. The manual gates will also be used for international travel.

A specially formed cell at the ministry has been working on the project for several months now and the reason Aadhaar has been chosen after much deliberation is because of its unique database, Choubey said.