With ACSA’s massive infrastructure development programmes at its three international airports, including the greenfield development of the new international airport in the city of Durban in KwaZulu Natal, well on its way in the run-up to the 2010 Fifa World Cup, the focus is slowly turning to our readiness to efficiently manage thousands of passengers through our various airports. Pre-empting scrutiny of ACSA’s operational efficiency, ACSA officials looked to some of the world’s most proficient airports and found that the concept of the Airport Management Centre (AMC) would go a long way in fulfilling ACSA’s mission of facilitating a world class customer service experience, through airport operational excellence.

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The concept
In adopting the concept of the AMC, ACSA was very careful from the outset to tailor the AMC model to the uniquely South African airports environment. What followed was the development of a model based on the one adopted by Zurich Airport, owing to its proven Collaborative Decision Making (CDM) processes that has resulted in a highly efficient airport environment. Like Zurich, the South African model includes the full participation of the airport community, including various airlines, ground handlers and various government bodies, but with a South African twist.

ACSA’s concept of the AMC has taken the model beyond Zurich and plans are afoot for the AMC to operate in the context of larger airport operations. More specifically referred to as ‘The House of Airport Operations’, this particular part of the model refers to key pillars that the AMC will be centred on and includes the pillars of People, Information and Infrastructure. The premise is that for an AMC to be successful, ‘The House of Airport Operations’ must work in harmony.

In particular, a new set of behavioural patterns for people would need to be instituted to ensure the efficient and effective process of execution. Secondly, the availability of information would play a crucial role, as would the third pillar, that is based on the technical infrastructure that would ensure the continuous flow of information without any outside disruptions.

This has translated into an AMC with firm focus on establishing the cross-community vision of deriving operational excellence in the core areas of baggage handling, aircraft movements and an enhanced customer service experience.

Common vision
With a clear focus on the active participation of all major stakeholders, a common vision for all the parties involved was quickly
determined. Key to the vision is punctuality in terms of on-time delivery of passenger, aircraft and processes. A drive toward excellence in the form of quality, in addition to sustainable improvement, in an effort to ensure the culture of continuous improvement, are also driving factors for the success of the AMC.

The AMC: operations snapshot
Various functional areas within airport operations, across organisational boundaries, will be responsible for delivering and executing daily operational plans, better known as base plans in the airport environment. A special ‘Event Detection’ process will be in place to record any exceptions or irregularities to the base plan.

Once such an event is recognised, the single integrated AMC system will highlight the occurrence to all relevant stakeholders in order for them to take action immediately. The integrated AMC system will allow these stakeholders to have a common situational awareness and as a result of the close proximity of representatives within the AMC facility, joint decisions will be made. The advantage of CDM is invaluable in the airport environment and will translate into quality processes.

Functional areas outside the AMC will also have access to the AMC systems and as a result of the common situational awareness, be able to act on events within their control. This will also allow the AMC to fulfil a monitoring role, with the capacity to focus on critical events identified in airport operations.

Perhaps the benefit of the AMC can best be illustrated by the simple, but common example of a late departure scenario. When an aircraft departs late, a delay event will be generated. Specific delay reasons and responsibilities will be assigned as a result and the information will provide valuable input into the punctuality monitoring of the airport.

Importantly, the AMC will also conduct trend analysis and highlight areas for improvement, consequently driving continuous or sustainable improvement at the airports. Finally, various Governance Forums will be established to provide ongoing input into the daily functioning of the AMC.

Technology
With the success of the AMC heavily dependent on continuous real-time or near real-time information, the technology used to make the AMC concept a reality is of particular importance.

In a nutshell, the AMC system needed to be developed in such a way, that it would be able to read-off existing separate ACSA and non-ACSA controlled systems within the larger airport environment. A system of this nature will provide the AMC with technology needed to turn the unique ACSA AMC concept into a reality, making much needed information available as and when needed.

Comprehensive Representation
The benefits of a facility of this nature are obvious for all stakeholders involved in the airport environment. With limited seats available in the AMC, ACSA made an informed choice of representation by looking at airport data and consulting with various outside entities for recommendations.

At O.R. Tambo for example, domestic air traffic accounts for 70 percent of total air traffic movements. It subsequently made

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sense for all the domestic carriers at O.R. Tambo to be represented within the AMC. That said, the all important ground handlers and relevant government agencies, such as Customs and Immigration Control, which all have an impact in the service value chain, have also secured seats in the AMC.

The Ultimate Goal
The goal is simple. By instituting the AMC, ACSA’s main aim is to complement its world class airport infrastructure with an operational system that will offer passengers a smooth and efficient end-to-end process, in the least amount of time possible by any international airport standard.

By setting clear goals in terms of airport operational efficiency, ACSA is gearing-up to maximise use of its current infrastructure, and could result in the delaying of any further capital expenditure programmes, speaking directly to the bottom line (a big plus in any language).

The AMC at O.R. Tambo is scheduled to go live at the end of May 2009, with Cape Town following suit in September next year. The AMC at the new airport in La Mercy will go live when the airport becomes operational in 2010.