

The Hold Room, Season 2 Episode 13 – Enrique Melendez and Jack Walfish

Transcript

[Introduction]

TJ: Welcome to The Hold Room with ACC: a quick update on all things relating to airport development as well as the Airport Consultants Council.

Laura Canham: This episode is part of the passenger experience headers hosted by ACC's Terminal and Facilities Committee in this series. We are collecting the experiences and perspectives about the future of passenger travel, including changing demographics such as the U.S. population, aging and becoming more multicultural, new technologies, labor, and supply chain. Shortages and what the future may have in store. Thank you for joining us in the Hold Room.

[Interview]

Laura: Hello everyone and welcome back to the Hold Room. I'm Laura, your host for today, and today we're going to kick off a little bit of a new part of our season which talks to each of the track hosts for the 2024 AAAE-ACC Airport Planning, Design, and Construction Symposium. So this conference takes place in Salt Lake City, UT from March 5th through 7th of 2024. It's a combined conference between the American Association of Airport Executives and the Airport Consultant Council. And so we're here to talk today about terminal and landside track host. So why don't you go ahead and introduce yourselves.

Enrique Melendez: OK, great. Thank you, Laura. I'm Enrique Melendez. I'm the senior special assistant consultant for the JW Group. I basically provide technology, business consulting to the airport industry at the C-level and beyond, if you will. My background is I've worked with airlines, I've worked with airports, I've worked with TSA, CBP, all around the world. So, I just bring many years of aviation experience at airports dealing with technology solutions and that's a quick summary of my background. Personally, I am electrical engineer by education.

Jack Walfish: And I, I'm Jack Walfish. I'm a principal with the JW Group. I've been in the industry for about 17 years. That entire time is spent on the technology, IT systems, IT infrastructure, planning, design, construction support, taking our clients through the entire process of that. You know, I know I'm the young professional. I just turned 40 in August. So, I just made the cut off. Happy to be here. Thanks.

Laura: All right, so tell. Us a little bit about your sessions.

Enrique: OK. Yeah. Well, let me tell you. First of all, it was a hard mix of inputs we got. Many inputs and then we had to decide which topics we thought would be interesting and we discussed them internally. So let's talk about the first workshop. The first workshop was focused on the digital identification checking. The reason I thought it would be a great topic is it's new in terms of doing the biometrics that check in. All you hear about on pilots recently. Last several years around the world been focused on air exit, the boarding gates and to some extent at the security checking. This is more focused than the passenger checking at the ticketing lobby. To make it touchless self-service and without an agent if you will and Delta of kind pioneered a pilot and there have been operational Atlanta airport and the Detroit

and they're expanding to two other airports before the end of the year. So as a result, I thought that would be a great topic. And so we're gonna have some airlines airport and talk about the program they have and how they see the future. And the challenges with that program and how airports and consultants could start designing in that environment. That's the first workshop session.

Jack: So, the second one is called Wheels Up: The New Flight Path for Post Pandemic Terminals. You know, obviously we've seen a lot of changes since the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic, we've seen a lot of changes in the way that retail and hospitality and you know, all sorts of business have changed how they operate. And so what this session is going to be doing is talking to some of the industry experts within aviation and also beyond to see what they've learned and what's being done. The different trends that are occurring out there and how we can bring that into terminal design for airports and kind of shape the new experience for our passengers.

Enrique: Yeah, just let me add to that. I think what's really exciting about this session is we'll have people from outside the industry to share their perspective. And how the trends they're seeing in other industries may apply to the airport industry in terms of design of future terminals. So, it's kind of exciting.

The next workshop number 3 is Innovation in Aviation: The future of Mass Timber. I think that's really a cool topic dealing with mass timber construction. You know, we're so used too many years of steel and iron construction. And the wood frames has kind of got out the door in terms of timber and the natural look and it doesn't have to be a northwest airport. You know, in terms of Northwestern part of United States, there's a lot of forests. I mean, you could apply a timber in any building in any region. So, we decided that's a good topic. We're going to have a session on the topic where the panel is going to talk about recent capital programs with airports using timber, so that'll be exciting. And the challenges with that, that go along and lessons learned, that's what workshop #3.

Jack: Number 4 is related to the Portland Terminal core redevelopment. Specifically, we're looking at the roof installation. You know, we just talked about previous session has timber, so it's using local timber there in Oregon to build this beautiful new roof in Portland and sustainability being a key aspect of that and optimizing daylight and reducing the cost of energy required to have that in the main terminal facility there in Portland, and Enrique. Anything to add to that?

Enrique: Yeah. I mean, the thing is going to be more about the roof installation and the challenge of installing a roof over an existing terminal that's operating. So, from an implementation construction perspective, the session will focus on that topic. So, we'll have the airport there along with some of the consultants involved in the project to talk about their experience and lessons learned. So that should be a good session. The last session is one that really was developed from two different inputs from the industry. Originally, we saw inputs on physical art at airports and the other one was multimedia rich dynamic displays. And so we decided to blend it two and how you can use both physical art and multi reach media to create a sense of place at an airport. So this topic we'll we'll talk about both topics and I think we have several airports lined up. We have a vendor and that'll be another interesting topic to show you, how art is changing the environment at airports today and the use of central art and in terms of exhibits and also how displays and technology is being used in a dynamic fashion to create a local sense of place for a customer and enhancing the passenger experience. So that's the last session.

Laura: Wow, that encompasses a lot of different things. Quite the plethora between art, passenger experience, sustainability, how to operate phasing of having an existing structure being used while a new roof is being put on. And I want to hear first what you're most excited about coming up.

Jack: I'll go first, Enrique, so you don't steal mine. Mine, mine's definitely the the blending the art and immersive multimedia. I'm definitely excited about that and especially having representation from some of the top industry experts on that type of passenger experience, I think there's a lot that can be gained from people attending that.

Enrique: Well, I'm actually excited about all those sessions. Because in a way, unlike in the past, we used to have a technology track that was separate from the other track, like terminal landside, planning engineering. Now with the importance of technology we've been able to blend within the terminal land side, the topic of technology. So that's why I'm excited about. Because I do have the technology background, even though I understand the brick-and-mortar side of airport planning and design and implementation. That's what I'm excited about that that finally the industry sees the importance of the role of technology in enhancing the passenger experience and making airports more efficient.

Laura: So going backwards a little bit, I wanted to see if you are able to give us a little bit more detail. I think it was about Session 2 where you talked about outside trends and how they influence aviation or how they might start influencing aviation. And if you could give us a little bit more of a tidbit for that session.

Enrique: Sure, I mean, we do already have the the kind of firms that we'll be speaking with. I'm not sure I can announce that at this point. But you know we have Airbnb is planning to speak. We have Google, a couple others. The point is that we're looking at hospitality. We're looking at retail. We're looking at Wellness. We're looking at mobility; employees. We're looking at every component that exists in an airport and how these components and other decisions entries have changed. Especially if you go to design a facility like a terminal facility. So that's where that's the focus of it. That's what's gonna make it exciting. I think there'll be a lot of insight to gain from the session coming from inputs from other industries. Especially from an architectural perspective or planning and designing a future terminal.

Laura: Do you think that terminal design will change based on some of those changes? Some of those more interactions of outside trends influencing aviation?

Enrique: I would said yes in the way of processes, operational processes, business processes, the level of automation that will impact airport staff, airport tenants, could be the airlines or non-airline tenants, they could be, you know concessionaires, food and beverage side, ground handlers, ... Technology's definitely coming in to automate more of the processes only because you have to. The industry is having a tough time finding basic employees with basic skills sets that want to work at an airport. I just got off a conference call with some industry folks where years ago being an aviation sounded exciting industry to be in. But being out some employees were treated after COVID and being laid off. Some people are scared to get back in. We as an industry have a challenge to overcome that perception and change it and convince people that aviation is still an exciting industry.

Laura: Agreed. Absolutely. So, I also want to hear about your previous experience at the Symposium. And what has your experience at Symposium been like? And what would you tell anybody who hasn't gone before of what they can expect and why they should go to the conference?

Enrique: First thing I'll say bring plenty of business cards or digital card where you can scan your QR code or NFC card. That's the way to do it, because I think the intent should be meet people, share stories, share experience, learn from attending these sessions, ask questions, any questions are good questions these conferences. Because we're all there to learn, and we're all there sharing our experience. And I say that because as a veteran in the industry, what I tend to do is talk to the young professionals and mentor them where I can on a topic, because sometimes they ask me how about this, what's your experience doing that and what are your thoughts? And I share that. And sometimes we even given career advice. Because I think it's an opportunity for consultants in the industry to meet and get to know each other closer. Maybe form future partnership with discussions about future partnerships and so forth. But most importantly, attend the sessions and learn about the topics that are being discussed.

Laura: I guess one of the things I'm always excited about is for the Symposium is that you get FAA to attend, you get outside industries to attend airports, a whole plethora of airport staff, consultant staff from engineering planning, right construction. And all working together with the same goal of moving the aviation industry forward.

Enrique: Yes, absolutely. And I would concur with that thought. And I would add that's one reason in our track we have a good balance of airline, airports, and the consultants and outside industry experts to address exactly what you just talked about to really envelope the discussion, share the experiences, what's going on. Not only in our industry and the changes that are challenging for us, but how all the industries are addressing those challenges.

Laura: OK. How about you, Jack?

Jack: Yeah. So I'm excited for a different reason, because this would actually be my my first symposium that I'll be attending. So excited to meet a lot of people that I've only seen on calls or emails in person and doing some networking. And obviously attending the sessions and learning a lot about what's out there in the industry, what the trends are, and seeing what people are up to. So, and obviously I'm excited for the terminal landside track sessions.

Laura: Absolutely, that's great. I hope you have a wonderful time.

Jack: Well, thank you.

Enrique: Salt Lake City is a great town to be in that time of year, so it's a great venue. The airport has just gone through major terminal construction concourses development and they're ongoing as we speak. So it'll be a good airport to visit a good city to visit and perfect place to have our conference.

Jack: Yeah. And also probably a good time for some spring skiing too.

Enrique: That's right!

Laura: Absolutely. Great. Well, thank you both so much for joining us today. Really appreciate your time.

Enrique: OK. Thank you, Laura.

Jack: Thank you very much, Laura.

[Outro]

Wendy: Thanks for joining us in The Hold Room for this special podcast series exploring the new passenger experience. You can find more from this series on the ACC Training Hub—that's training.acconline.org/the-hold-room—or wherever you get your podcasts, including Apple Podcast, Spotify, Stitcher, etc. Follow us for more content from the Airport Consultants Council. You can support this podcast by leaving a rating or review and by telling your friends and colleagues about the podcast. Thanks again.