

# Fiumicino revitalised

Despite suffering a major fire in May, Rome Fiumicino continues to see increasing traffic, underpinned by the reinvention of Alitalia under Etihad's stewardship. **Luigi Vallero** provides an update from Italy's busiest airport.

While the economies of parts of southern Europe have suffered in recent years, the capital of Italy continues to attract visitors from all over the world. Highlighting this unabated interest are traffic figures that saw Rome's two airports (Fiumicino and Ciampino) register a 6.4% increase in passengers during the last calendar year, compared with the year before.

Fiumicino Leonardo da Vinci Airport (FCO), the busiest in Italy and eighth-busiest in Europe, recorded its best ever results when it handled 38,506,908 passengers in 2014.

The positive trends have continued into this year, the airport registering a 5.2% increase in traffic so far. Domestic traffic has grown by 5.1% thanks to additional low-cost flights by Vueling and Ryanair, while international passenger numbers have increased by 5.2%, due in part to the availability of additional connections in the United Arab Emirates.

Thirteen destinations have been added to the airport's network which, linked to a 6% capacity increase on existing routes,

was expected to raise traffic by 1.4 million passengers compared to last summer.

## Terminal upgrades

As often happens at major hubs where traffic growth overwhelms the facilities, surveys suggested that passengers' positive perception of Fiumicino has declined in recent years. To address this, long-awaited improvements are being undertaken now that should improve impressions in the years to come.

To cope with traffic increases, including growth generated by a reinvigorated Alitalia, substantial developments already approved have been pushed forward. This year around €350 million is being invested in the infrastructure at FCO, almost twice as much as in 2014. Improvements are being made to each terminal and long-term projects are being sped up.

The May 7 fire was a major setback for the airport. It started in Terminal 3 shortly after midnight, and at its peak the building's frontage was engulfed in flames. It took many hours to put out the blaze and

capacity at the airport was reduced by 50% over the following days.

Many flights were cancelled and it took more than two months for all the damaged areas to be restored, during which time some airlines were temporarily relocated to other parts of the building and popular facilities such as frequent flyer lounges were unavailable.

A complete refurbishment of Terminals 1, 2 and 3 has taken place in recent months, including the introduction of much improved toilet facilities and a complete revamp of the food offerings - which now include Sicilian street food at Anticca Focacceria San Francesco or innovative hamburgers at The Burger Federation as well as more complex restaurant-style dining.

Although work on the long-awaited Pier C was started in March, 2008, it had been progressing slowly. Additional investment this year has included €102 million allocated to complete the pier and boarding areas E and F, which will open in 2016.

These areas cover 970,000sq ft (90,000m<sup>2</sup>), boast 14 A380-capable gates

▼ Following Etihad's acquisition of a 49% shareholding in Alitalia, the Italian carrier has reaffirmed its commitment to the hub at Fiumicino. (All photos author)

▲ The range of food and beverages available in all three terminals has been improved over the last 12 months.

► New routes and increased traffic from LCCs including Vueling and Ryanair resulted in the pace of construction work on Piers C, E and F being increased.



and will provide the airport with a 5mppa increase in capacity. A commitment to proceed with the reconstruction of boarding area A, which will offer an additional 14 airbridges, has also been made, two years ahead of original plans.

Supporting these developments, the airport's baggage handling system will be subject to a €17m update, boosting its capacity to 11,000 items per hour. A further €21m will be invested in the construction of new aircraft parking stands, €12m will be spent to improve the terminal exteriors on the arrivals level and one of the runways will be completely resurfaced.

While a great deal is being spent on infrastructure, airport operator Aeroporti di Roma (AdR) recognised that improving the quality of the airport is not just about the buildings. The company has recruited 50 additional staff dedicated to assisting passengers in the check-in, arrivals and baggage halls. A multilingual call centre has been set up to assist travellers with trains and buses and traffic information, and new electronic totems and monitors installed to provide information within the terminals.

## Surface transport

To support the traffic growth, the frequency of the Leonardo Express linking the airport with Termini railway station in Rome has increased from 88 to 110 daily, with a train leaving every 15 minutes at peak times.

Last December, the airport's station was connected to Trenitalia's Treno Alta Velocità (high-speed rail) network, and daily Frecciargento (Silver Arrow) trains now link FCO with Florence, Bologna, Padova and Venice.

## New Alitalia, new airlines

Earlier this year, Alitalia underwent a major makeover following investment from Etihad. The changes included a new livery and improved cabin service along with a commitment to return the carrier to profitability, grow its network, increase frequencies and improve service.

Firstly, the airline reaffirmed its commitment to FCO as its primary hub. Then, in June, it launched flights to Seoul using Airbus A330s. Meanwhile new short-haul routes opened over the past few months have included Marseilles, Düsseldorf

and Berlin. Domestic services to Pescara and Perugia have also been launched, operated by the ATR 72s and Saab 2000s of Etihad Regional/Darwin Airline.

Other airlines are also adding or increasing services to FCO. A newcomer is WOW Air, which has started flights from Keflavík. Vueling, the Spanish-based low-cost arm of International Airlines Group (IAG), has launched services from its fast-growing Rome base to London Gatwick, Bilbao, Lyons, Budapest, Vienna, Nice and Marrakech, plus peak-season trips to Las Palmas, Samos, Larnaca and Mytilene.

This summer, Vueling had 50 daily departures from FCO, a 62% increase over last year, confirming the airport's important role in its ongoing growth.

Developments in the LCC arena also include easyJet adding Munich, Alicante, Kos, Zakynthos and Santiago de Compostela; Jet2.com launching non-stop flights from Belfast; and Ryanair serving Seville and Marseilles alongside new domestic routes to Bari, Brindisi and Comiso.

Full service carriers are not ignoring FCO. Korean Air has de-linked its long-standing






Rome and Milan service and is proposing to fly non-stop to both; and in addition to Alitalia's new service, Asiana Airlines has also started a thrice-weekly service to the South Korean capital.

Hainan Airlines has launched Airbus A330 services from Chongqing, China - and Singapore Airlines, Air Canada Rouge and Delta Air Lines have all increased frequencies. Meanwhile, following its partnership with Alitalia, Etihad Airways has upgraded its daily Abu Dhabi trip from an A330 to a Boeing 777-300ER.

Traffic between Turkey and Italy is also growing rapidly, prompting newcomer SunExpress to launch twice-weekly services to Izmir, while fast-growing Turkish Airlines is adding a link to Sabiha Gokcen that will complement its traditional five times daily Istanbul Atatürk.

### Big plans

Looking forward, AdR's vision for 2044 includes the massive Fiumicino Nord (or Fiumicino Two / Due) development, which will see a completely new €12.1 billion terminal complex constructed to the north of the existing facilities and Runway 07/25, between Runways 16R/34L and 16L/34R, along with a fourth runway. When it is completed the capacity of the airport will be increased to 100mppa.

To date the work is not funded, and only time will tell if the project gets under way as hoped. Yet Rome will always be Rome, and with so many people wanting to visit the Eternal City, the chances are it will happen sooner or later. 



◀ The new piers will go some way to alleviating the congestion in the existing facilities, exacerbated by a fire that broke out in Terminal 3 earlier this year.



◀ When Piers C, D and F open next year, additional boarding gates will be available and the number of aircraft parked on remote stands will decrease.

▼ A variety of LCCs now serve the airport, including Blue Air from Romania, Milan-based Blu-express and Irish airline Ryanair.

