

**GUIDES FOR
THE
GROUNDED**

No matter how carefully you plan—picking the best hour of the day to fly, avoiding the most congested airports—if you travel frequently, a delayed flight is almost inevitable.

The Web site **Sidestep.com** offers ideas on what to do with that time (besides browsing the same kiosk over and over) with its new series of airport guides. By the end of the year, Sidestep's library will include 150 international and domestic airports. The interactive guides have sections with information on parking, restaurants, stores, and transportation. Hungry? Browse the restaurant section, organized by terminal and type of cuisine. Looking for a last-minute gift? You can quickly locate the nearest Christian Dior or Swarovski outlet. The Web site also allows you to monitor flight status to determine when your flight is arriving or departing and how long it is delayed. An extra the site lacks, however, is a flight-alert feature, so sign up for one with your carrier if you want to be contacted via text or e-mail regarding schedule changes. —Jennifer Welbel



Aviation Enters the Satellite Age

ADAM BAER looks at the FAA's NextGen navigation system

FLIGHT DELAYS ARE due not just to extreme weather and overscheduling by airlines but also to America's antiquated air traffic control (ATC) system, which still operates on ground-based radar technology that dates from the 1930's. ATC detects America's planes once every 12 seconds on its radar. That means there's a lot of room for controllers to lose sight of an aircraft. Given that reality, the FAA requires significant distance between planes for safety: a buffer zone of three to five miles in good weather, and more in a storm. The problem, however, is that while maintaining these buffers wasn't a problem when the radar system was designed, there are many more planes in the sky these days. In 1970, there were 2,500 commercial planes and 1,800 corporate jets in America's airspace each day; today there are 8,000 commercial

planes and close to 18,000 corporate jets. As a result, the system moves slower, planes must fly convoluted paths, and travelers have learned to expect delays.

Yet there's been a technical solution for using the sky more efficiently for close to a decade: a satellite-based GPS system called Automatic Dependent Surveillance Broadcast (ADS-B), the centerpiece of the NextGen program. (Yes, your rental car's navigation system may employ more advanced satellite technology to get you to your hotel than the plane that flew you to your destination.) Currently, a satellite-based technology called Required Navigation Performance helps some airlines at select airports. But NextGen, scheduled to be fully deployed by 2025, promises to locate planes precisely, straighten airline paths, and get pilots and air traffic controllers on the same page—or the same »

*** FAST FACT** Since 2001, the price of the average domestic plane ticket has declined by 10 percent...