

Category: 2 - Meeting the Challenge of a Difficult Job – Specialty Contractor

Contractor: Encore Electric

Project Name: Eagle County Airport

Set against the Rocky Mountains at close to 7,000 feet of elevation, the Eagle County Airport offers visitors the opportunity to enjoy the ski slopes, trails, and breathtaking mountain views that the surrounding landscape boasts. Several years ago, the airport authority realized that the increasing numbers were creating a very crowded airport and required a new terminal built for larger planes and more traffic. Comparing peak day passenger traffic makes Eagle County Regional Airport the second busiest airport in Colorado. In 2013, a study commissioned by the Colorado Department of Transportation Aeronautics Division found that the total quantifiable impact on the local economy from the airport in that year totaled \$635,900,000. In addition, the Eagle County Regional Airport created 6,294 jobs, paying \$217,500,000 in wage, according to the Eagle County Website. The Eagle County Regional Airport is now home to a brand new 47,000+ square-foot terminal, accommodating 24 additional flights per day through the winter and two flights per day in the summer. The new space adds about 10,000 square feet to the airport and included accommodating complicated power requirements at each traveler seat in the terminal as well as all types of planes, ensuring a seamless experience for Vail Valley’s visitors. Encore also incorporated future electrical service upgrades, and installed conduits that will be used in the future to add air conditioning to the four new passenger boarding bridges.

Encore Electric decided to pursue this project for many reasons, including previous electrical projects at Eagle County Airport. With Encore’s history working in the airport, our team had a unique understanding of the built-in electrical capacity available for the expansion. However, an in-depth understanding of the building’s history didn’t keep us from looking ahead.

Encore Electric provided all power, technology, and lighting needs for the new terminal, and retrofitted and upgraded various systems in the existing airport building, including fire alarm and safety. Nearly 20,000 man hours were spent on the project.

In addition, twenty-four televisions, thoughtfully framed like art, display various media and flight information, and 35 floor boxes accommodate phone and laptop charging, creating a functional and welcoming space for travelers. Travelers who have utilized this airport in the past will appreciate the new amenities and refreshed look, and new travelers will be welcomed to Eagle County with an amazing first impression of the type of place that Eagle County has become.

Encore Electric worked with our general contractor partners at Hensel Phelps on this project. The two teams integrate at a high level, as they often partner on large, complex projects like this. This means that our project management teams are familiar with each other, have often worked together, and can anticipate any difficulties that may arise due to organizational differences. The similarities between the two organizations are much greater than the differences, however. Bill Carson from Hensel Phelps said, “It’s a great team. They’re engaged and thinking through the issues and are ensuring that the airport is up and running. It has been good.”

The great success of this project didn’t come without its fair share of challenges, including stringent TSA security protocols, frigid winter temperatures, and the imperative that construction not interfere with the rest of the functioning airport. Another recurring project challenge was finding a balance between budget and legacy. Lighting design options were modified by the architect several times as the design team worked hard to achieve this balance.

TSA was ever-present throughout the project, running frequent security checks on the construction teams. Encore Electric worked closely with the airport security team to pull power and data underneath the security checkpoint. The Advanced Imaging Technology x-ray machine at the security checkpoint must work at all times for TSA security screeners, which meant overnight and off hours to ensure that the work was not visible and didn’t impact any flights. Encore also worked to integrate power charging and in-floor conduits so that power could feed through the chairs in the terminal. The original design didn’t consider this, and the team worked hard to accommodate this critical addition to the project.

It was a six-week process to get the crane used for the construction in place, take down all the existing lights in the work areas and replace them once the crane was in place. All the lights in

the new facility are LED Lights, as Eagle County has its own initiative with energy savings and these lights were a challenge to retrofit and install and fit right in with their strategy.

This project not only brings much needed upgrades to a regional airport, but really opens all types of new air traffic to come to Eagle County. As it currently stands, the slow season for the airport is the summer, when travelers can fly on larger planes into Denver International Airport and then drive the 120 miles to Eagle County and area destinations like Vail, Leadville, Glenwood Springs and the Western Slope. There are currently more than 80 flights a day in and out of the airport, and this project will allow that traffic to expand dramatically.

It is important to note that the Eagle County Airport provides an economic lifeline to this area, especially in these uncertain economic times. By providing more point-to-point travel, this airport can help support the flow of commerce to the Colorado mountains and Western Slope. By creating a destination for travelers to linger and not just pass through, the airport will create an important point to collect additional sales taxes and support the services that residents of the Western Slope of Colorado depend on every day.

With sights set on becoming an international flight destination, the new jet bridges and the new terminal will really help this vision get off the ground.