

BrandSafway and HAKI®

Keep Airport Foot Traffic Flowing

› Access to a ceiling for HVAC work is usually a simple scaffolding job. But when the ceiling is directly over one of the busiest escalators in the world, it's a head-scratching challenge. Fortunately for contractors working in Concourse T at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta, and the millions of passengers below, BrandSafway thrives on these kinds of challenges.

Atlanta BrandSafway Branch Manager Steve Nix explains that with 80 million people passing through every year, Hartsfield-Jackson ranks among the busiest airports worldwide. And most who are starting or ending their trip at Atlanta use the escalators in question.

When the contractor, Dunn Aviation, looked at the location of the project ahead of them, the actual HVAC work was a big job, but a fairly clear one.

"It involved a lot of duct work above a false ceiling, and replacing some large, heavy air conditioning units. But what the construction team couldn't picture was what the workers would stand on to do the job. One side of the work area was 30 feet above the lower end of the escalator bank, while the opposite side was over the top of the escalator," Nix said.

If the project was somewhere else, it might have been simple enough to close the escalators and build scaffolding on top of it. But if there's

any escalator in the world that can't just be closed for construction, it's the one in Concourse T — the main entrance to the sprawling airport terminal complex.

Dunn Aviation knew BrandSafway by reputation as a provider of traditional scaffolding. The contractor also had confidence in BrandSafway as a provider of safe, productive solutions to unusual access challenges. The confidence was well-placed.

When Dunn Aviation asked the BrandSafway team to look at the problem, the answer was a single word in Swedish: HAKI.

HAKI provides temporary weather protection and access solutions, including HAKISPAN, a high-strength truss system, which allows unobstructed spans over large areas. Using lightweight, easy-to-handle modular segments, HAKISPAN was an ideal solution for this project. Due to their light-weight design, the segments go together quickly to create long trusses on site. The spans are frequently used to enclose buildings and other large worksites for weather protection; however they can also be used to support a safe, stable work platform.

In this case, Dunn's workers needed a square platform 33 feet on a side, while the area below was kept clear and safe, so the escalators could carry passengers from 4 a.m. to 11 p.m. ›

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“There was no other way to do it,” said Ed Alcock, general superintendent for The Jon Smith Group, which handles construction management for Dunn Aviation. “It had to be a free span, and the HAKI system was the answer.”

He added, “Our number one concern with Hartsfield-Jackson was the safety of passengers and airport employees.”

A key advantage of the HAKI system’s modular design was the easy way it could be loaded into the building. It was all brought in through an opening made to the building’s glass wall just for this purpose. With BrandSafway’s smart project management system, each piece was ready for loading in the correct position. Once inside, each piece was placed for efficient assembly. No equipment was needed inside the building to move or install the lightweight segments. Everything was easily assembled by hand.

“This is a very congested area with a constant flow of foot traffic,” Alcock explained. “But BrandSafway was very well organized. They started with good drawings, and everything was stacked and orderly, so they didn’t have to sort through parts to get the scaffolding up,” he said.

The whole thing was set up in five short night shifts, from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m., when airport traffic was at its lightest. But then there was an unexpected change. “Although we had supplied drawings of the scaffold

for the airport to review,” Nix explained, “in the course of installation we were asked to alter the system to create more headroom for passengers entering the escalator. We were able to modify our setup on the fly and meet the airport’s requirements.”

“It went like clockwork, which was important because we had limited time,” Alcock said.

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The HAKI system proved its flexibility, and the BrandSafway engineers showed their clever thinking, when the HVAC work was completed and a new drop ceiling was to be installed several feet under it. Rather than requiring workers to crouch while installing the ceiling, or making airline passengers duck when they came up the escalator, the planking was simply repositioned. That is, support members that had been placed on top of the HAKI trusses were simply moved to the lower bar of the trusses. HAKI trusses have a vertical depth of about two feet. Decking was then placed on the lowered support members.

In this Hartsfield-Jackson Airport installation, the load rating was 20 psf. Ironically, the load wasn’t limited by the strength of the HAKI system or scaffolding across which the spans were laid. It was limited by the strength of the floor of the airport concourse itself. “The BrandSafway crew was professional from the get-go,” Alcock added, noting the entire job was finished on time with no incidents. ◀

