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Deal with no-no items in a new way

(<http://www.dailysouthtown.com/business/tridgell/180764,211TRD1.article>)

December 21, 2006

Travelers at O'Hare International Airport have an alternative to losing their confiscated items at security checkpoints.

They can drop them in the mail.

Taking a cue from other major airports, the Chicago Department of Aviation last week launched something called Mailsafe Express.

The service by Smarte Carte of Minnesota allows fliers, through self-serve kiosks that resemble ATMs, to discard the belongings forbidden by checkpoint screeners. The items -- for a fee, of course -- can be sent via the U.S. Postal Service or UPS. Or they can be held for \$9.99 at the UPS Store at the Hilton on the airport grounds for pickup after the return trip home.

Almost 200,000 items are taken by O'Hare screeners each year. Things such as scissors, knives and cigarette lighters are obvious no-no's. But lost every day are thousands of seemingly harmless items -- cologne, makeup and shampoo.

With the new kiosks, they can be saved. But they better be worth it.

Lighters cost \$25 to send through the mail, \$45 if delivered internationally. The postage for liquids is \$14 domestic, \$25 international. Other non-hazardous materials cost a minimum of \$8.95 to send.

Only credit and debit cards are accepted.

Transportation Security Administration workers will escort customers to the machines to make the transactions.

A spokeswoman for the city said the machines will be tested for the next 60 days at six locations in Terminals 1, 2 and 3. If they are a success, they probably will be making an appearance at Midway Airport next year.

The next couple of weeks are going to be a busy time at both airports.

An estimated 3 million travelers are expected to pass through both places before the end of the year. The busiest day will be Friday, when 240,000 folks visit O'Hare and 62,000 descend on Midway.

Wrapped presents are not recommended as carry-on luggage because they are subject to inspection. Complimentary gift wrap will be available past the checkpoints. Volunteers will be on hand to do the wrapping for free.

Etc.

Metra temporarily is revamping schedules and fares for the holidays.

Family fares -- a maximum of three free child fares with a paying adult -- will run on weekdays through Jan. 5 beginning Friday. Also, the \$5 ride-all-you-want weekend passes will be good for an extra day on Christmas and New Year's Day. All lines will operate on holiday schedules both days, though most stations will be closed with just the platforms staying open.

Expanded schedules will be offered the next two Fridays on the Rock Island District, Heritage Corridor and SouthWest Service lines.

Visit www.metrarail.com for complete schedule information.

Burnham Avenue under the Kingery Expressway in Lansing reopens to two lanes in each direction today. The barren areas along the sides of the road will be landscaped in the spring.

If you have any suggestions or comments for On the Move, transportation writer Guy Tridgell may be reached at gtridgell@dailysouthtown.com or (708) 633-5970.

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