



Berlin Brandenburg Airport 'Ready for Take-off' After a 9-Year Delay

by Muhammed Yilmaz

Constructed in Berlin, the capital of Germany, Brandenburg Airport opened its doors on October 31, 2020, nine years after its first planned opening date. Airbus A320neo, owned by easyJet, was the first aircraft that landed at the airport. Normally, two A320neos owned by Lufthansa and easyJet were scheduled to perform parallel landing simultaneously. However, this was not possible due to negative weather conditions. The planes had to land one after another on the same runway.

This meteorological misfortune was regarded as normal, pale beside what has happened since the outset of the Brandenburg Airport project. Let's take a closer look at the Brandenburg Airport project, which has become a dent in Germany's global reputation for efficiency.

How was the Brandenburg Airport Project decided?

There were 3 airports in Berlin, the capital of Germany, which was reunited with the fall of the Berlin wall on June 13, 1990. Two of the airports, Tegel and Tempelhof, are located in the former West Germany, and the other, Schönefeld, in the southeast of former East Germany.

In 1992, it was decided that to have a single airport in the city in order to better manage the air traffic. The new airport would be built and opened, and the others would be closed.

After nearly 15 years of planning, the construction work of the new airport began in 2006 on the land alongside Schönefeld Airport, with the idea of cost saving by making use of the existing runways

and other infrastructures. So, in the beginning everything was quite different compared to today.

The airport construction has become an unfortunate dent in Germany's renowned engineering excellence and diligence. The wonderful unique airport project to be built in the capital turned out being a long-winded story, and this project, closely followed all around the world, has become a source of embarrassment for the Germans.

The opening of the Airport was postponed 6 times

The opening date for Brandenburg Airport was first announced as October 2011. However, due to numerous setbacks, the opening date was updated as June 2012, March 2013, October

2013, June 2017 and finally October 2020.

In the announcement stating that the opening date was updated as October 2020, it was also reported that an additional budget of €1 billion was required for the project completion. The total cost of the project, which started in 2006 with an initial budget of €2.83 billion, exceeded €7 billion. Lufthansa Board Member Thorsten Dirks hit the right note summarizing the German mood of that day: "This airport will probably never open!"

During such postponements made one after another, the idea of making Brandenburg the single airport of Berlin was abandoned. Because the traffic, increased by fast-growing carriers such as the city's biggest player, easyJet, had grown faster than expected, especially in the last few years, in double digits. Tegel and



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Schönefeld, two airports in Berlin, served a total of 33.3 million passengers in 2017. Brandenburg's annual passenger capacity was initially projected around 34 million. While we were wondering how Brandenburg would respond to this growth rate, with the decision to make Schönefeld Airport the additional terminal building of Brandenburg, the annual passenger capacity of the new airport was raised to over 40 million.

Following the opening, it is planned to increase the

annual passenger capacity to over 50 million with the commissioning of two satellite terminals within a 3-stage plan. This means the construction will most probably continue at the airport for the next 10-15 years.

Reason for being almost a decade late

The airport project was in quite a mess due to the involvement of two separate states, Berlin and Brandenburg, and the federal government. The

shares of each of Berlin and Brandenburg states in the project were 37% and the share of the federal government was 26%. Problems such as planning failures, changes in design, and poor subcontracting and shoddy workmanship slowed down the progress. The failed privatization initiative, claims for damages of neighboring houses, shops, restaurants and even the unused train station regarding the noise pollution contributed to budget exceeding of the initial budget of € 2.8 billion.

The construction planning company declared bankruptcy in 2010. The opening ceremony scheduled on June 3, 2012 and which Angela Merkel and 10,000 guests were supposed to attend was canceled just 3 weeks before the inauguration due to the failure in fire alarm systems and smoke detectors. Then it was understood that this was just the tip of the iceberg, because after that date, it was discovered that many other huge technical mistakes were also made.



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A Bird's eye view of BER from 2013

AIRPORT



According to Deutsche Welle (DW), 90 km of electrical cables were incorrectly installed, and 4,000 doors were incorrectly numbered. The escalators were too short and the emergency line to the fire department was erroneously constructed. It was even alleged that the roof of the airport was twice the authorized weight. In 2013, the European Union launched an investigation for the airport's flight routes, whether Germany breached EU environmental directives.

On top of all these failures, new allegations of corruption involving the activities of Siemens, Bosch and Deutsche Telekom in the airport fell like a bombshell and an investigation was launched. The German media portrayed the issue as the lack of ethical and moral values and accountability.

One of DW's claims was that the chief of the airport project was an imposter, not actually an engineer. It was also alleged that the whistleblower who had called out the corruption was poisoned at the airport,

but such allegation has not been proved so far. Also, one of the former directors of the airport project was jailed for taking huge bribe of €150,000 from the Imtech fire protection system company.

The assignment of politicians with limited project management experience for managing the supervisory board, the government's guarantee for taking steps to cover the extra costs and reduce some of the financial stress in such an important infrastructure project were also amongst the factors

that turned the project into a mess.

Berlin's mayor Klaus Wowereit, famously called the city "poor but sexy", was forced to resign also because of the airport project fiasco.

Construction companies, taxi companies and many of the owners of the shops that would be located at the airport went bankrupt due to delays. German newspaper Bild claimed that such developments cost German taxpayers €25 million per month. This medium-sized mega project was regarded as the "money pit" by the Germans.

Following the inauguration

Climate activists sought to disrupt the opening of Brandenburg airport, the construction of which took 14 years. Thousands of activists inside and outside the terminal, many dressed up as penguins, protested the opening of the airport when it finally opened 9 years after the originally scheduled inauguration date.



The airport welcomed Turkish Airlines at BER Terminal 1 from Istanbul_on 2nd November



Pegasus Airlines is one of the first airlines to depart from BER Terminal 5 on 25th October

With the inauguration, Berlin Schoenefeld Airport was officially renamed Brandenburg Terminal 5 (T5). Schoenefeld's IATA code was officially changed from SXF to BER, in line with the role of the additional terminal building serving the new airport.

Despite all the criticism, Brandenburg seems compatible to serve the vibrant German capital. Brandenburg will be able to host more than 40 million passengers per year at its three terminals (T1-T2-T5). A total of 17 airlines, including Ryanair and Wizz Air, will serve passengers from the previous Schoenefeld but new Brandenburg Terminal 5. Terminal 5 alone will be able to host 8-10 million passengers per year.

Following the inauguration of Brandenburg, airlines have gradually moved

there. EasyJet and Lufthansa made the first landings on October 31st. The first departure from the new terminal was made by easyJet, which flew to London on November 1st. Qatar Airways and Turkish Airlines were the first airlines that moved from Tegel Airport to Brandenburg T1.

A wide variety of services are available at T1 with 120 shops, restaurants and service facilities, spanning more than 20,000 square meters.

Tegel Airport closed

Berlin's historic airport, Tegel, closed its doors for good on November 8th, following the opening of the Brandenburg Airport. Air France, the first commercial airline that landed in Tegel 60 years ago, was the airline that made the final departure from the airport.

Airbus A320-200 (F-GKXP) of Air France with flight number AF1235 departed for Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport and it



Last Flight from Tegel Airport, Air France Lift off on runway

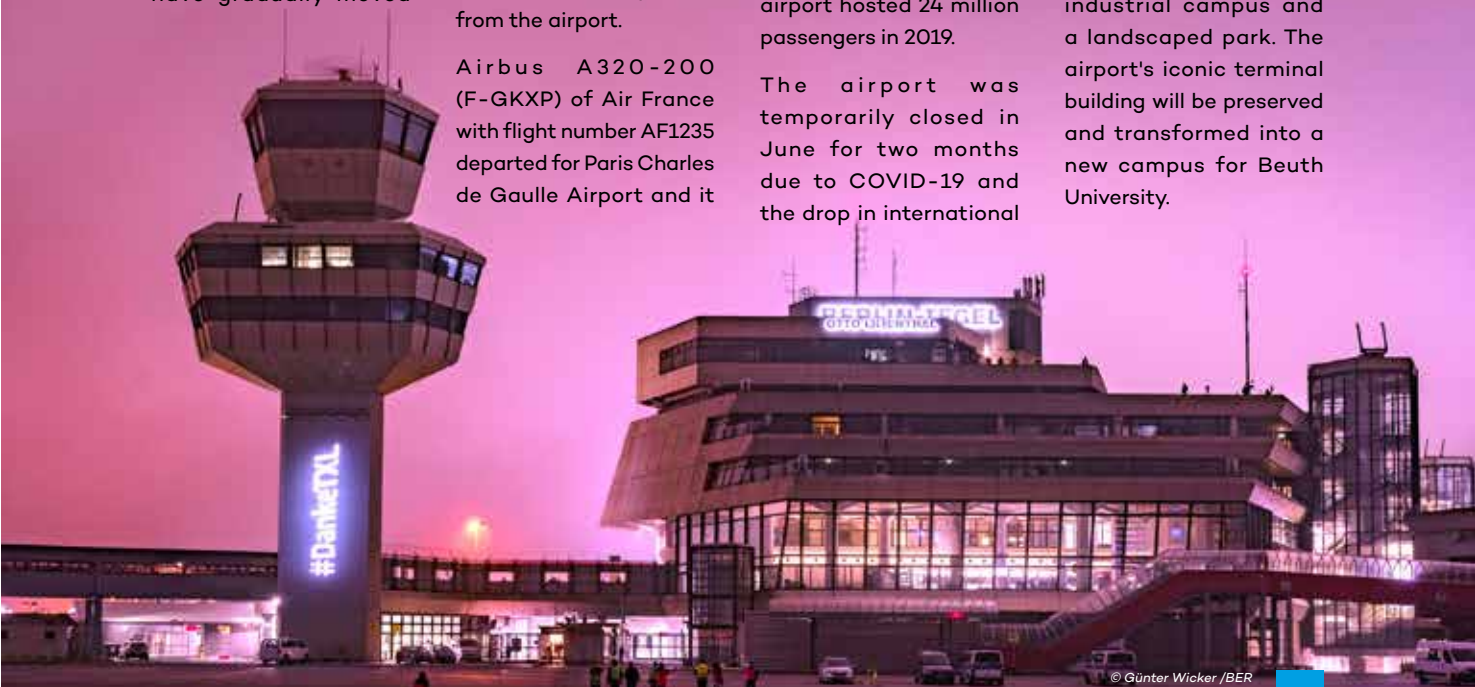
was the end of an era in aviation!

With Brandenburg's delayed opening of nine years, the small, historic airport in the heart of Berlin headed for the last roundup. Constructed in only three months to serve as the main airport of the German capital in 1948, Tegel was designed to serve only 2.5 million passengers a year, but the airport hosted 24 million passengers in 2019.

The airport was temporarily closed in June for two months due to COVID-19 and the drop in international

travel demands resulted in Tegel airport seeing its last passengers off a few months later than expected.

Tegel, which was closed to commercial aviation operations, will be transformed into a new research and industrial park called "Berlin TXL", a complex that will include much-needed homes, a vast research and industrial campus and a landscaped park. The airport's iconic terminal building will be preserved and transformed into a new campus for Beuth University.



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