Prescreening Draws Interest as Lines Grow at Terminals

By ABBY GOODNOUGH

MIAMI, Aug. 11 — The security lines at Orlando International Airport in Florida on Friday provided an unusual glimpse of the future in these increasingly terrorism-conscious times.

As a member of the nation's only express security program, Carolyn Adams, a frequent flier, whisked through a special lane at the checkpoint. Ms. Adams, a prosecutor traveling to Atlanta, had only to approach a kiosk akin to an A.T.M., insert a small plastic card, place her fingers on a touchpad and wait for her identity to be verified before passing through the metal detector.

She is among 29,000 people who pay $80 a year to be "registered travelers" in the program, which is currently only at Orlando. The Transportation Security Administration says it will extend to as many as 20 other airports by the end of the year.

"It makes it quicker," said Ms. Adams, who flies about once a month and approaches security checkpoints through an entrance just for members.

With new restrictions imposed on Thursday making airport security lines much slower and longer in many cities, frequent travelers are more eager than ever for the program to grow, officials said. The private company that operates Orlando's program, Verified Identity Pass Inc., said that it had the security agency's permission to expand to Indianapolis, Cincinnati and San Jose, Calif., in the coming months, and that many others were eager to join.

"You're not going to see masses signing up," said Cindy Rosenthal, a company spokeswoman, "but there is clear interest in business travelers using this."

The program requires people to provide fingerprints or an iris scan upon enrollment, and to submit to a background check conducted by the security agency and the Department of Homeland Security. When applicants are approved, their biometric data is placed on a plastic card; at the airport, their iris scan or fingerprints are matched against the card.

The system is not perfect, and has its detractors. Members must still have their carry-on luggage scanned by X-ray machines, which makes some airports question whether the extra effort is worth the expense and trouble. A few airports have turned down the system because officials fear that it will make regular security lines longer by reserving lanes for registered travelers.

"If anything, it will cause backups in other lines," said Mike Boyd, the president of an aviation consulting firm in Evergreen, Colo. "I think it will die under its own weight."

The federal government paid for five other airports — in Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Boston, Houston and Washington — to try out the program last year with a total of 10,000 enrollees. After the trials were evaluated, the program was approved, and a number of airports are in the process of applying.

But Orlando, Florida's busiest airport, was eager to participate even after it was not chosen for the experiment, so it hired Verified Identity Pass to set up the program under the name Clear.

Chuck Carothers of Jackson, Tenn., who is not a program member and was plodding through Orlando's security line, said he thought the concept was not necessarily a deterrent.

"People interested in terrorism obviously could purchase something like this," he said, "and find a way around it."

Howard Simon, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida, agreed, saying background checks were not fail-safe. "It presumes that we have a complete and accurate database that consists of every terrorist," Mr. Simon said. "When you're dealing with the lives of several hundred people on a flight, that's a presumption that makes me rather insecure."

Amy Green contributed reporting from Orlando, Fla., for this article.