## Atmosphere 10.2009



## **Airport Angst** Is DIA's Great Hall renovation *really* necessary?

Coloradans love to hate on

DIA—cue the Blue Mustang, creepy wall murals, and 2006 blizzard fiasco-so it's no surprise that the South Terminal Redevelopment Program has sparked a public uproar: The multiphase, seven-year overhaul will cost an estimated \$800 million. (Taxpayers, fret not: DIA will generate the money with airport bonds and other existing funds.) The revamping will include construction of a new adjoining Westin hotel and light-rail station-Hallelujah!-and the conversion of the Great Hall.

Originally designed for

passengers to mingle and shop before security, the Great Hall was thrust into primary duty as an amped-up TSA-manned center following 9/11. The cordoned-off space now occupies two-thirds of the hall, and travelers trudge through the often lengthy lines like dejected cattle. Not surprisingly, the Great Hall's businesses have suffered: Shopping pre-security is tough if you're running late, departing passengers can't bring drinks through security, and few laid-over folks will schlep back through metal detectors just for a souvenir.

Enter the redevelopment plan, which aims to restore the Great Hall to its original purpose. By moving security to the current ticketing or baggage areas, the hope is to make the Great Hall more accessible to departing fliers or those with a Denver stopover, which will boost revenue from concessions. For those worried about where to meetand-greet the in-laws, the plan includes a public plaza above the light-rail platform.

The remaining question: Will the invigorated bagel/ smoothie/souvenir shops be enticing enough for passengers to bypass the Paradise Bakery in Concourse C, board the train for three stops to the Great Hall, purchase snacks and some gum there, and reboard the train back to their gates? For those with long layovers: perhaps. "[This project] will create jobs and help DIA be even more competitive in the global market," says Denver city councilman Charlie Brown. "This is one of the greatest airports in the world. It can't remain on top by staying the same."

That may be true. Even so, those bagels better be pretty damn good. -JULIE DUGDALE