As you sit in the terminal waiting for your plane to board, you are overcome by the smell of delicious food and the sounds of a live band local to Austin. Yes, a live band in a terminal, and yes, local to Austin.

You look around the terminal and see interactive maps that help you navigate the airport with more ease. You can see all of the construction that is taking part outside of the airport and inside of the terminal. It is becoming apparent that the long walkway of the terminal has become more crowed and list of arrivals and departures are continuing to become. This is no longer the small regional-fell airport Austin has had over the past couple of decades. This is the new and improved ABIA.

These changes Austin Bergstrom International Airport (ABIA) is making to improve the overall customer experience for its passengers have been happening for the last five years. This comes with the massive growth the airport has seen in the 20 years of its operations, and its quick rise to becoming a major airport in the U.S.

When ABIA started operations in 1999, it was planned to handle 11 million annual passengers. At the end of 2018, it was recorded that the airport serviced nearly 16 million annual passengers. Over the years, ABIA has had to scramble to make changes that could accommodate the large number of passengers.

According to Jennifer Williams, the Planning and Development Supervisor for ABIA, the airport has seen nearly double the national average for the typical growth of an airport.

“Over the last 5 years we have grown at 9.5% growth, so even in the last 5 to 6 years we have had a huge increase in growth in a very short period of time.”

With this begin said, it is clearly that the pressure to improve the infrastructure of the airport is a top priority, but it is also something that is going to take time. In the beginning of 2019, ABIA opened their 9-gate expansion of their main terminal. This is one of the first big changes that will soon be accompanied by the addition of 32 gates that are planned for the airport’s 2040 Master Plan.

Williams said that is the airport continues on it current growth trend, it could potentially be the size of Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport (DFW) in the next 20 years. After the completion of the Master Plan, the airport should be able handle the 32 million annual passengers that are forecasted.

While this may not be a shocking thing to airport officials, it does shock people of Austin. For some, the thought of having the airport become a major hub is something hard to believe. Some even find it hard to believe how large the operations are now.

But how uncommon is for a city with less than a million people to have a major airport? Surprisingly, it is not uncommon at all. Some of the largest airport in the country are in cities with less than a million people. Some of those include Seattle, Salt Lake City, St. Louis, Kansas City, Nashville, Minneapolis and Tampa.

Nashville (BNA), Tampa (TPA) and Salt Lake City (SLC) are actually the airports the at ABIA is looking at when it comes to inspiration according to Williams. BNA and TPA are currently serve around the same amount as ABIA and SLC serves nearly 30 million, so that is their future inspiration.