



Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor

Rose Harvey  
Commissioner

**New York State Office of Parks,  
Recreation and Historic Preservation**

Albany, New York 12238  
www.nysparks.com

October 12, 2012

Anthony Stramaglia

VIA email:  
[als@paracom.net](mailto:als@paracom.net)

**Re: Freedom of Information (FOIL) Request #243-12  
Project # 01PR01183**

Dear Mr. Stramaglia:

Attached is the information you requested in regards to the above mentioned FOIL request.

By law, I am required to inform you that you have 30 days by which to appeal this determination. Appeals must be directed to Patrick A. Bradford, General Counsel, to the address contained on the letterhead.

Sincerely,

Petra M. Larsen  
Records Access Officer

08101.007166

NOT NRE



### Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau Resource Evaluation

DATE: 8 March 2001

STAFF: Kathy Howe/Virginia L. Bartos

PROPERTY: Former Pan Am Terminal

MCD: Queens

ADDRESS: JFK Airport

COUNTY: ~~Queens~~ Queens

PROJECT REF: 01PR01183

USN: 08101.007166

I.  Property is individually listed on SR/NR:  
name of listing:

Property is a contributing component of a SR/NR district:  
name of district:

II.  Property meets eligibility criteria.

Property contributes to a district which appears to meet eligibility criteria.  
Pre SRB:  Post SRB:  SRB date:

**Criteria for Inclusion in the National Register:**

A.  Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history;

B.  Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;

C.  Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; or represents the work of a master; or possesses high artistic values; or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction;

D.  Have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

III.  Property does not meet eligibility criteria.

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:**

Based on the information submitted, it is the opinion of the State Historic Preservation Office that the Pan American Airlines Terminal at JFK Airport in Queens County, New York is no longer eligible for listing in the State and National Registers of Historic Places due to extensive alterations and additions. The building does not meet the criteria for listing due to loss of historic materials, design workmanship, feeling and association.

01PR01183

**Technical Memorandum**

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**Eligibility Examination**

**Former PanAM Terminal  
JFK International Airport**

**Prepared under contract to:**

**Landrum & Brown**

**For:**

**PORT AUTHORITY OF NEW YORK AND NEW JERSEY**

**By:**

**FITZGERALD & HALLIDAY, INC.  
157 Oxford Street  
Hartford, Connecticut 06105**



**February 28, 2001**

## Introduction

The former Pan-American Airways terminal at what was known as New York's Idlewild Airport, now known as the Unit Terminal Building (UTB) at John F. Kennedy International Airport, was initially constructed in 1959-60. Designed by the firm of Tappets-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton, with Ives Turano & Gardner as associated architects, the building, with its overhanging canopy, was determined eligible for the National Register (NR) by the New York State Historic Preservation Office (NYSHPO) in 1988. As a result of recent plans by Delta Air Lines, Inc., the building's current tenant, to further alter or eliminate the building, and pursuant to a series of telephone conversations between Fitzgerald & Halliday Inc., staff (Steven Bedford) and the NYSHPO staff (Kathy Howe), the NYSHPO has asked that the issue of NR-eligibility for the UTB be revisited. TAMS

The intent of this document is to provide information to the NYSHPO that will aid in determining the building's current eligibility status. In an effort to explain the changes that have occurred at the UTB over time, this report will discuss the building's original condition and then detail all known changes to the structure.

## General Background

The building forms part of the Port Authority of New York's 1955 plan (devised by Wallace Harrison) to create a gateway to the city by creating a series of linked, decentralized facilities with individual terminals for each major carrier. These were all to be linked by a ring road and grouped around a 160-acre open space containing a landscaped mall and surface parking. Upon its completion, the PanAm terminal, then known as the International Unit Terminal, was built in virtual concert with the architecturally diverse International Arrivals Building (1957), and separate terminals for such airlines as American (1960), United (1961), and TWA (1962). Ancillary structures, including three chapels, were also added to the mix. Known as Terminal City, the architectural assemblage has received mixed reviews since its inception. It has been referred to as an "architectural zoo" (White & Willensky, *AIA Guide to New York City*, 1967) and, in 1962, Ada Louise Huxtable characterized it as a:

*. . . curious exercise in architectural anarchy. in which nothing focuses; everything fights. The terminal buildings wage incessant war on one another through their aggressively individualistic and unrelated design. (quoted in Stern et al., New York 1960; p. 1019).*

## Original Condition

As originally completed in 1960, the UTB consisted of a large elliptical roof canopy (450 feet by 350 feet) that sheltered a much smaller two-story, glass-enclosed, rectangular-box-shaped structure. This structure projected as a three-story building beyond the canopy to the south, providing additional gates and administrative space. The walls of this "box" were independently supported by metal mullions with cut-out webs, perhaps meant to simulate the structure of an aircraft.

By permitting aircraft to dock virtually all around the building, the elliptical shape was touted as a means of reducing the distance the passenger had to travel between ground and air transportation. However, the box-like shape of the building enclosure itself belies that rationale. As Robert Stern (*New York*, 1960, p. 1013) and others have noted, the choice of such a building shape was a mixed blessing. In 1962, *Architectural Record* 130 (September 1961, pp. 165-167) noted that the strategy of placing aircraft around the terminal, nosed-in, exactly fixed the number of aircraft that could ever be docked at the terminal, not a far-thinking strategy in a growth-based industry.

**Concourse level:** A glass windscreen decorated with bas-relief sculptures of the signs of the zodiac protected the automobile ramp that led up to the building. Reached by the automobile ramp, the main or concourse level was located approximately 10 feet above the ground, roughly the same level as the floor of a Boeing 707. Open to the air on its northern side, a passenger passed through a massive air curtain to the check-in area. Planes were reached via an external ramp that connected to a narrow deck, which ran through the columns supporting the 32 radial girders of the canopy. Stairs from this deck also connected down to the flight apron. The rear third of the concourse level was occupied by concession stands, an elevator, stairs to the mezzanine, and access to the south concourse.

**Mezzanine level:** The mezzanine level of the building was reached by two cable-supported stairs, an elaborate curved stair, and an elevator. It contained a restaurant and coffee shop over the main concourse, while administrative offices were located over the south concourse. A separate clubroom was reached via internal and external stairs. An observation deck ran through the piers at the upper levels.

**Apron level:** The majority of the space in the apron level was devoted to mechanical, crew and baggage handling functions. The northern quarter of the building was devoted to passenger baggage claim.

**Canopy:** The four-acre roof system for the UTB was intended to be a visually striking image with a functional intent. The 110-foot-long cantilevers were not only meant to protect the relatively small (100,000 square feet) glass box beneath it, but also provide shelter for the aircraft parked at the gate, minimizing the effort required to de-ice the aircraft before departure and facilitating snow removal in the immediate apron area. Although seemingly daring, the engineering of the structure, albeit massive, is rather straightforward (one individual interviewed described it as "plain vanilla engineering"). Thirty-six radial pre-tensioned steel girders rest on piers at their approximate midpoints. The tensioning cables (six for each girder) are fastened to a central tension ring. To overcome the moment of the overhang, the ring is held down by six columns anchored in the hydraulic fill beneath the terminal by 1,750 tons of concrete. The roof deck is constructed of lightweight reinforced concrete poured over three-inch-thick, cellular glass panels, which form the acoustically absorptive undersurface of the canopy. The canopy is designed very much like a cantilever bridge. Although dramatic, this type of roof construction is not unique and was used extensively in hangar design of the mid- to late 1950s. Variants on this roof structural system are the following: TWA Maintenance hangars in Mid-Continent Airport, (near Kansas City, Missouri, constructed 1955-56), and in Philadelphia (1955-56); the PanAm

hangar at Idlewild (1957-58); and United Airlines hangars in San Francisco (1958); and Cleveland (1958); as well as numerous U.S. Air Force hangars throughout the country (Milner, 1999; Webster, 1998).

### Critiques

Critical recognition of the terminal was highly limited after its construction. Aside from the aforementioned *Architectural Record* article, other publications about the structure were limited to pictorial spreads and simple descriptions. Subsequent scholarly evaluation of the building has been limited and somewhat negative. In 1978, critic Elliot Willensky (*AIA Guide to New York City*) described the building as a:

*Tour de force produced [sic] a parasoled pavilion unfortunately marred from the beginning by gross details (i.e. the meandering drainpipes around the great piers). Now expanded manifold [sic] into a complex as large and confusing as the Palace of Knossos, the parasol is but an entrance canopy to this depressing maze.*

In 1995, well-known architect and critic Robert A.M. Stern evaluated the building as follows:

*Aside from the bold engineering of the cable-supported roof, the design held little interest; particularly egregious was the ungainly windscreen at the entrance, which featured Milton Hebard's trite sculptures representing the signs of the zodiac. (New York, 1960, p. 1013)*

In 1996, photographs of the building were included in the Art Institute of Chicago's exhibition entitled "Building for Air Travel." The accompanying catalogue, edited by John Zukowsky, cites the terminal primarily as a component of Terminal City (p. 88), whereas Eero Saarinen's TWA terminal received a full-page discussion. Similarly, Carter Wiseman's recent history of American 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture (*Shaping A Nation*, Norton, 1998) is silent on the design of the Pan Am building; but quite eloquent in discussing the TWA terminal and Dulles Airport (p. 201)

### Changes to the Structure

Over time, many of the features of the UTB have been altered, as it has been changed from a freestanding element on the landscape to a component of a three-building system. Certain supposed amenities in the original building were almost immediate failures. The air-curtain entrance, the largest in the world, could not keep out the force of winter nor'easters and was replaced with revolving doors by 1965.

As noted above, the shape of the structure also worked to its own disadvantage. The elliptical shape was not easily expandable and essentially limited for all time the maximum number of gates at the terminal to eight, and these could accommodate nothing larger than a Boeing 707. The arrival of much larger jets in the late 1960s made the UTB and its external-ramp plane access system obsolete.

As a remedy, construction began in 1968 on a 750,000 square foot addition, placed at the south end of the building, supplanting (i.e. demolishing) the south concourse, while the rest of the UTB was completely reconfigured. Primary access to the building was via roadways that wrapped around the UTB and connected to the trapezoidal addition, known as the PanAm World Port. The floors of the UTB were expanded outward to the radial piers, and a new curtain wall system was installed. The observation decks and plane access ramps were removed, with the latter being replaced by partially fixed jetways that spanned over the access roads running around the building. By moving the airplanes out from underneath the canopy, the initial intent of the massive cantilever roof, to provide protection for the aircraft, was nullified. The southern stairs of the mezzanine became free-standing elements, as the mezzanine itself was cut back from the southern edge of the building. The curving stair near the center of the building was removed. All concession areas were completely altered and the interior refitted. This major effort was completed by 1972-73.

Alterations to the UTB continued through the 1980s. Security systems were added to the entry from the ramp sometime in the early 1980s. In 1988, a third terminal (Terminal 2) was completed to the west of the UTB, and a massive connector was built to the UTB. This allowed the airline's passengers to walk between terminals without going outside, but it further transformed the use of the UTB from a single stand-alone terminal into a passageway between the World Port area and Terminal 2. This is not to say that the UTB's sole function was that of a glorified passageway (the building housed six gates), but thousands of people passed through the UTB every day with the express purpose of simply getting to another terminal. In 1990, the north end of the UTB was reconfigured into a first class passenger lounge with new amenities including rest rooms and an overhanging garden-like terrace. This change restricted access on the original building ramp to first class passengers only. The lower levels of the UTB have also been the source of constant change and upgrade. Partitions are moved and new spaces formed as necessary.

### **Structural Condition/Integrity**

The structure has begun to show signs of age and wear. The roof and many of its joints have begun to leak. A rubber membrane was placed over the canopy in order to eliminate these leaks. This repair is viewed only as a temporary fix because the urban air environment tends to react with the rubber, softening it. Furthermore, water seeping into the concrete encasement has begun to react with the steel. The consequent rust has reduced the adhesion between the concrete and the steel, with the result that some concrete has spalled from the underside of the beams. Additionally, the concrete web of the canopy was poured over cellular glass blocks. These blocks have begun to delaminate in many locations, dropping off on the roadway and apron below, opening the potential for foreign object damage to aircraft engines. A substantial water leak of unknown origin has been found beneath the building. The extent of this leak is being monitored to ensure that it does not undermine the concrete counterbalances for the roof system.

Since one of the key determinants of National Register Eligibility is integrity, it is important to note that virtually no space within the UTB has been untouched. The mezzanines are completely changed. The main concourse in no way resembles its original form. For all intents and purposes, the UTB now forms part of another structure. Direct access to the UTB is highly limited, and most passengers experience the building either as a passageway to another terminal or as a gate to an airplane. With Burger King and Starbucks as its concessions, the building is no longer an entrance to the elegant world of flight. The interior spaces are much more akin to a suburban shopping mall than to the original form and atmosphere of the UTB.

### **Eligibility**

Normally, properties less than 50 years old are not considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. In order to assure historical perspective and avoid judgments based on current or recent popular trends, the 50-year period was established as a guide for evaluating the historic resources worthy of preservation. However, Criterion Consideration G of the National Register Criteria for Evaluation provides for the recognition of historic places that achieved significance within the past 50 years; a property of that vintage maybe eligible if it is of exceptional importance. Guidelines for evaluating and nominating properties less than 50 years old were originally published in 1979 and were revised in 1990, 1996, and 1998.

In 1988, NYSHPO determined that the UTB was exceptionally significant under Criteria A and C for its:

*. . . innovative use of cantilevered steel beam and concrete slab design and construction. . . . The use of modern construction materials to achieve dramatic expression in the terminals constructed as part of [the] Renovation [sic] [of Idlewild airport] was [of] exceptional importance at the time, and was influential in public industrial architecture of the early 1960s. . . (Stokes, May 23, 1988)*

No supporting material was attached to this determination. From the material available, it is unclear if the NYSHPO received a detailed description of the alterations already underway and completed by 1988. Nor is it apparent that the effects of any subsequent renovations were evaluated by the NYSHPO. NR designation requires integrity of materials, yet it is clear that little remains of original building aside from the piers and canopy structure. This finding would seem to call into question the integrity of the structure, particularly for a building that is only 40 years old.

From the point of view of structural innovation, it is clear that the UTB is one of many air-travel-related structures that employed post-tensioned cantilever systems of great length. While its elliptical form may be considered by some to be somewhat distinctive and visually striking, it has limited architectural significance and has proven to be a functional liability. Its basic elliptical shape has had little influence on subsequent airport design, while the United Airlines terminal at Idlewild, with its single level approach roadway and fingers for loading and unloading passengers, was much more influential.

In terms of its importance as an image of the elegance of air travel during the early 1960s, the former PanAm terminal's initial sleek form may have been highly influential in creating a



particular erudite modernist image for air travel. However, the TWA building was certainly more of an image of the elegance and dynamism of air travel, while the Skidmore Owings & Merrill-designed International Arrivals Building epitomized the image of corporate America in the late-1950s and 1960s.

As critics seem to agree, the UTB is, at first blush, a building with an interesting initial image created by a massive roof. This image, however, had limited longevity due to its guaranteed functional obsolescence. The structural system used to create the image was a type that had been employed for aircraft hangars for some time prior to the construction of the terminal. The limited scholarly evaluations available give the building a rather lukewarm reception and certainly do not cite the building as one of exceptional importance. On close examination, it appears that the terminal has lost most of its architectural integrity. There is an abundance of information that calls into question this building's exceptional significance, and little evidence to support its current eligibility status.

## References

### Books:

White & Willensky, *AIA Guide to New York City*. New York: Macmillan, 1967 and 1978.

Stern, Robert, A.M., et al., *New York 1960*. New York: Monacelli, 1995.

Wiseman, Carter, *Shaping a Nation: Twentieth Century American Architecture and Its Makers*. New York: Norton, 1999.

Zukowsky, John, ed., *Building for Air Travel*. Munich: Prestel and the Art Institute of Chicago, 1996.

### Periodicals and Reports:

"Airports Building Types Study," *Architectural Record* 160 (October, 1976): pp.125-140.

"Idlewild: New York International Airport," *Architectural Record*. 130 (September, 1961): pp. 151-190.

"Historic American Engineering Record Report No. PA-561, TWA Maintenance Hangar, Philadelphia International Airport," prepared by John Milner Associates, 1999.

"International Unit Terminal: Pan American Passenger Terminal, New York International Airport," *Progressive Architecture* 42 (November, 1961): pp. 140-145.

"New Luxury Lounge is created for first class travelers at Pan Am's World Port Terminal at JFK Airport in New York City," *Interiors* 146 (June 1987): p. 54.

### World Wide Web Resources

Webster, Julia, "Historic and Architectural Overview of Military Aircraft Hangars," 1998 prepared for the Army Corps of Engineers, Construction and Engineering Research Laboratory (CERL), and available only at [owww.cecer.army.mil/techreports/webster98](http://owww.cecer.army.mil/techreports/webster98).

### Regulatory Guidance:

"National Register Bulletin: Guidelines for Evaluating and Nominating Properties that Have Achieved Significance Within the Past Fifty Years," last updated 1998, available at [www.cr.nps.gov/nr/bulletins/less50.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/bulletins/less50.htm).

"National Register Bulletin: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Historic Aviation Properties," 1998, available at [www.cr.nps.gov/nr/bulletins/avhome.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/bulletins/avhome.htm).

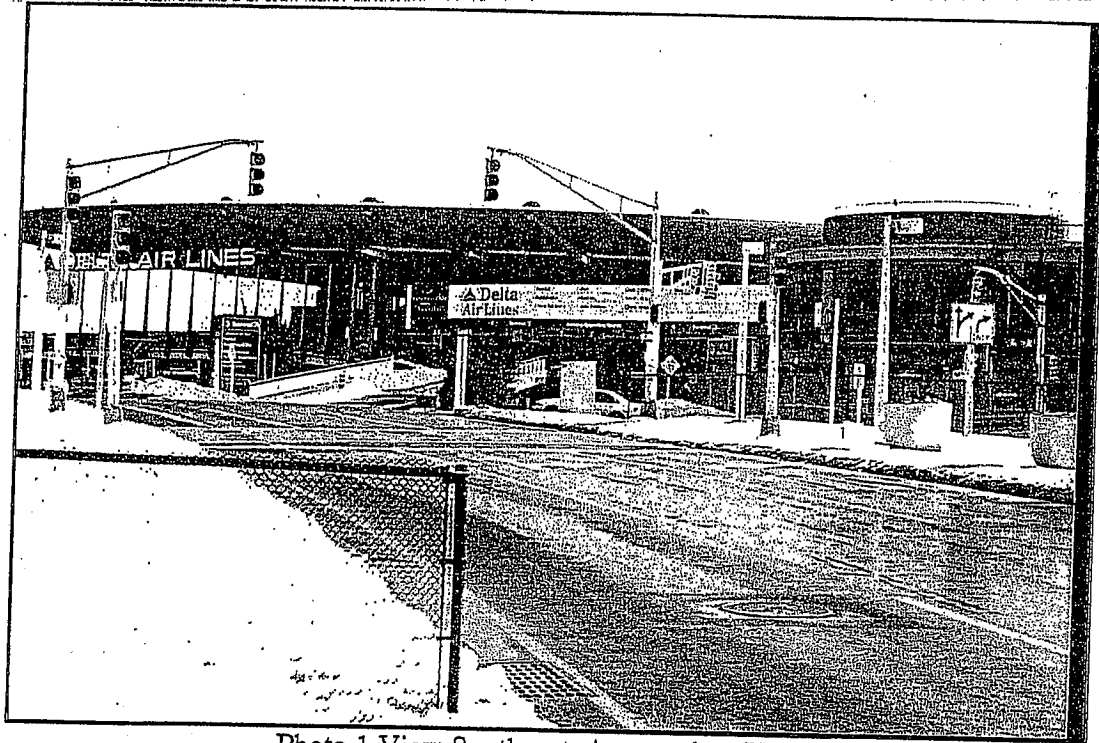


Photo 1 View Southeast, Approach to UTB

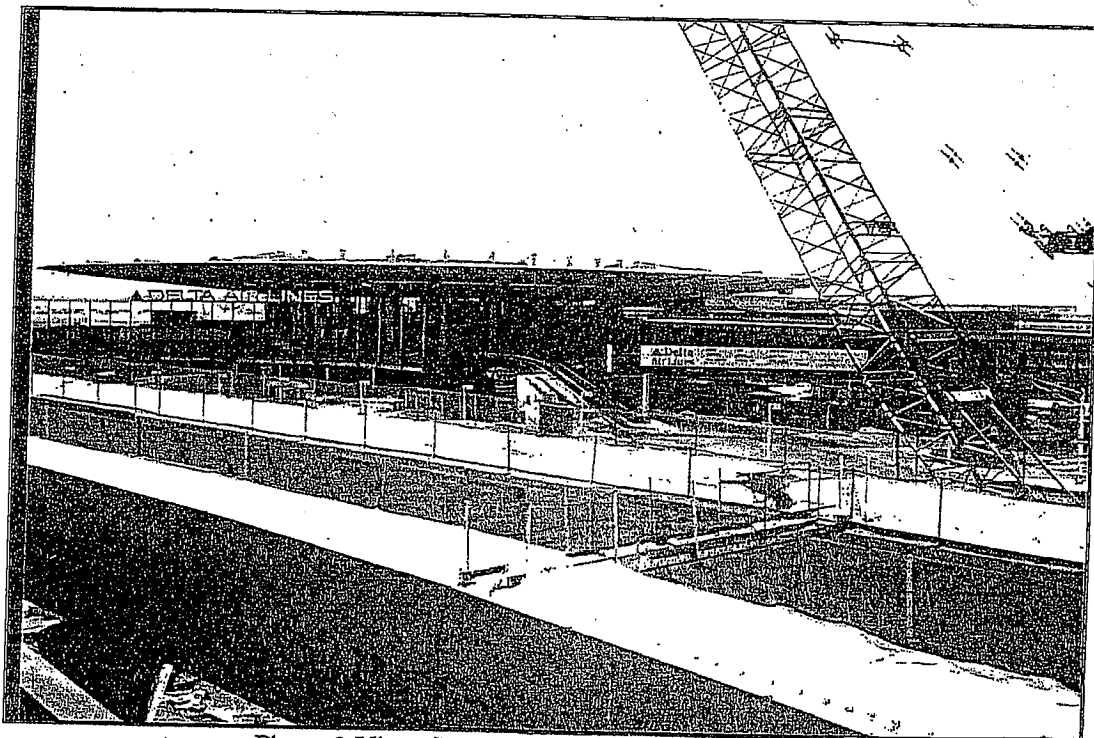
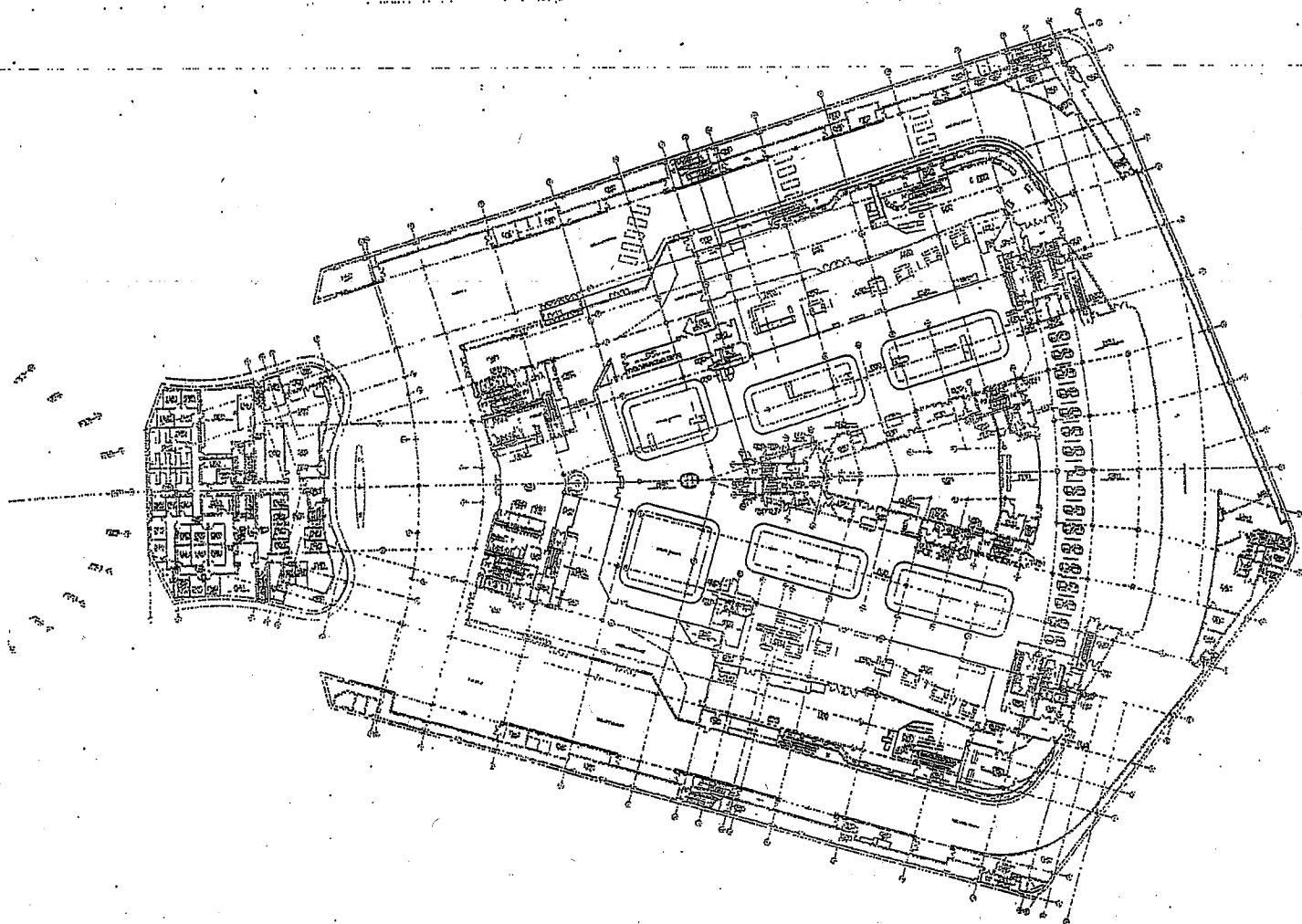
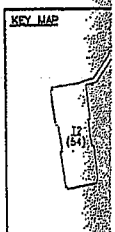


Photo 2 View Southeast, Overall view of UTB

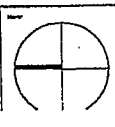


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		0207	CURR. EX. EAST	TRAVELER	100.3								

ABBREVIATIONS	
DLA	DELTA AIR LINES, INC.
M.R.	MANPOWER RESOURCES
U.S.D.A.	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
U.S.P.H.C.	U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH CENTER
D.C.	DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
U.S.D.A.	U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
M.R.	MANPOWER RESOURCES
OPS.	OPERATIONS
A. CONTROL	ARRIVAL CONTROL
DLA	DELTA AIR LINES, INC.
CON.	CONSTRUCTION



Project No. **98337** Date **01/10/00**  
 Scale **1/32" = 1'-0"**  
 Drawn by **C. OLIVERI**  
 Date **01/10/00**



DELTA AIR LINES  
 CAD DOCUMENTATION  
 DFC AND T2  
 BUILDINGS 53 & 54  
 JOHN F. KENNEDY  
 INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT