



02: SmartGate trial

What was the SmartGate trial?

The SmartGate trial was undertaken to test whether face recognition is suitable technology for border processing in a working airport environment. The trial was conducted from November 2002 to June 2005.

Where was the trial held?

The trial took place at Sydney and Melbourne international airports.

Who took part in the trial?

Qantas crew were the initial trial users, followed by Qantas first class passengers, Chairman's Lounge members and Platinum Club frequent flyers. Over 10 000 passengers and crew undertook more than 295 000 transactions during the trial period.

How did the trial work?

In 2002, a SmartGate kiosk was installed in the arrivals hall of Sydney International Airport. Participating crew were enrolled by having their photographs taken which were stored in a database.

When the enrolled trial participants used SmartGate, they inserted their passport and the Machine Readable Zone at the bottom of the colour photo page in the passport was read. This enabled SmartGate to access the appropriate digital image on the database and compare this with the image taken of the traveller by the SmartGate camera.

In September 2004, the trial was extended to Melbourne International Airport and Qantas first class passengers, Chairman's Lounge members and Platinum Club frequent flyers (holding Australian passports and aged 18 years and over) were invited to enrol.

In December 2004, a kiosk with a microchip reader was installed at both locations when Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade introduced a 'prototype' ePassport (i.e. a passport with a microchip embedded in the centre pages and a gold international ePassport symbol on the front cover). This enabled SmartGate to compare the face image stored on the microchip with the person presenting at the SmartGate kiosk. No enrolment was necessary.

Was the trial evaluated?

Yes. A comprehensive evaluation report was released on 6 February 2004. Some of the results showed:

- 98 per cent of crew members preferred SmartGate to other clearance methods
- Australia had the world's most advanced automated border entry solution based on face recognition.

What was learnt from the trial?

The trial results confirmed that face biometrics could be used for identity verification purposes and Australia's border protection would not be compromised by the introduction of SmartGate.

The Australian Customs and Border Protection Service (Customs and Border Protection) also learned that certain aspects of the system needed refinement (i.e. more efficient lighting and passport readers). These have been incorporated in the design of the new version of SmartGate.

What has happened since the trial?

Customs and Border Protection engaged SAGEM Australasia Pty Ltd as its strategic partner to design and develop the necessary hardware and software for the new version of SmartGate. This version has now been implemented at Australia's major international airports.

Where can I get more information?

You can email smartgate@customs.gov.au or ring the Customs Information and Support Centre on 1300 363 263.

Please Note: All media enquiries should be directed to 02 6275 6793 (all hours) or email media@customs.gov.au