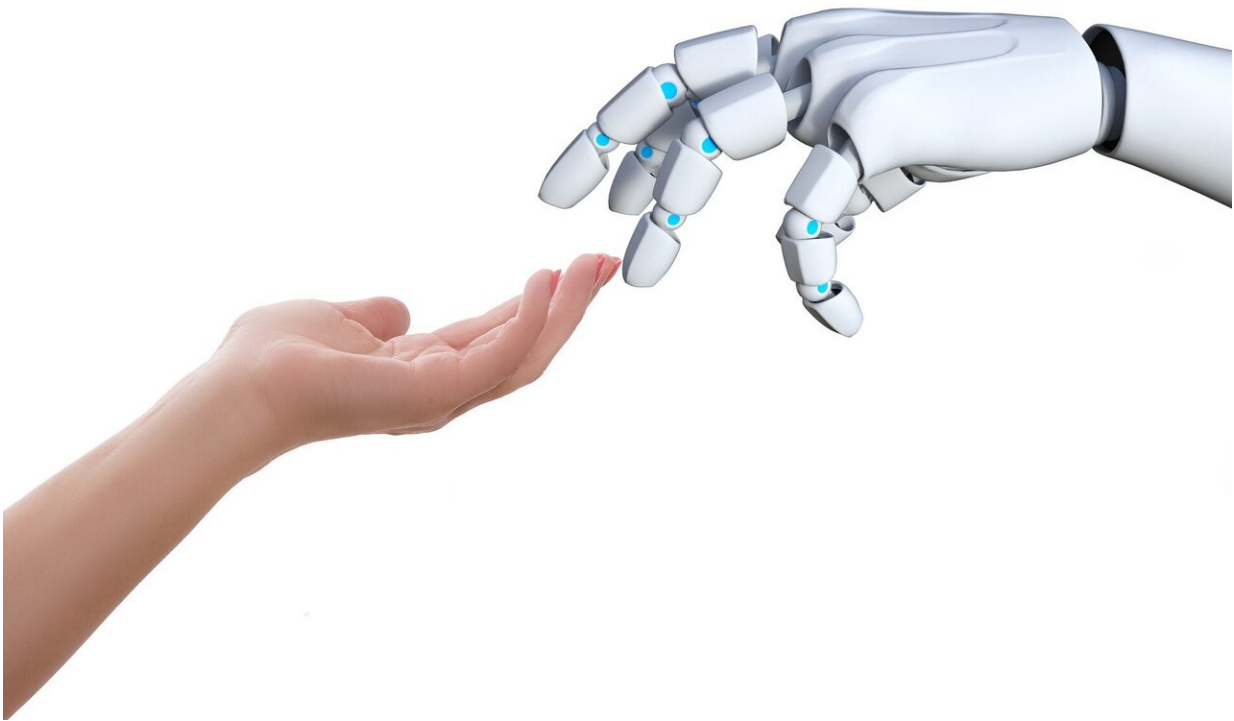


A 7-foot-tall robot at Dallas Love Field is watching for unmasked travelers and curbside loiterers

April 13 2022, by Kyle Arnold



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Yes, those 7-foot-tall machines at Dallas Love Field are watching you. They want to make sure you're wearing a mask if you're boarding a flight or not parking too long at the curb if you're picking up a returning

traveler.

Love Field is testing two Security Control Observation Towers at the [airport](#), one near baggage claim and another near security checkpoints, to figure out whether robotic assistants can both help customers get around and warn passengers who are breaking rules. The robots can also call [airport security](#) and operations in case more help is needed.

While not quite "RoboCop," the machines, nicknamed SCOT, were installed a month ago to "determine if they are capable of efficiently supplementing current airport operations," said Love Field spokesperson Lauren Rounds.

The robots look like many other kiosks at the airport with a [touch screen](#), including way-finding information, maps of parking garages and directions to ride-hailing and shuttle pickup. But SCOT is much smarter, capable of detecting what people are wearing and even whether they've got on a [face mask](#).

Airports have been at the forefront of [technology](#), including facial recognition and other biometrics, for years, a trend that worries privacy advocates who say there are few, if any, laws or guidelines about how emerging technology should be used. Amazon took criticism in 2019 after testing its Rekognition technology with [police departments](#) before deciding to ban law enforcement from using it two years later.

But private businesses and airports have been more aggressive, and the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred more emphasis on touchless interactions using computers. Fort Worth-based American Airlines uses facial recognition for some customers to check bags and airports such as DFW International Airport partner with the U.S. State Department for facial recognition technology for incoming passengers.

Surveillance technology hasn't stopped progressing because the rest of the world was in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. In fact, more and more institutions and companies are using artificial intelligence to monitor spaces, said Adam Schwartz, an attorney for digital privacy rights group Electronic Frontier Foundation.

"It is concerning that an airport has installed a new system of [artificial intelligence](#)," Schwartz said. "It raises a lot of questions about what that technology is doing."

Love Field is one of two airports to start using the technology from the company Robotic Assistance Devices, said Steve Reinharz, the company's CEO and founder. The other airport, which Reinharz said he was not able to disclose, uses a related technology from the company in parking lots to deter thefts and break-ins.

"This has more of a full-circle purpose to be a regular, physical deterrent," he said. "That's the direction the industry has to go because we have some significant labor issues."

The robotic SCOT kiosks can detect passengers and behavior based on rules set by each user, such as the airport. For instance, people driving up to the curbside drop-off area late at night might get a series of verbal warnings that escalate in volume and severity. Finally, the machine can call police, notify on-site security or even allow someone to make an announcement remotely.

The machines can also detect flagged individuals based on what they are wearing, especially if they are in areas susceptible to crime, such as baggage claim, Reinharz said.

License plate-scanning cameras can issue warnings to suspicious vehicles or prompt cars to move along if they've been waiting too long in

passenger pickup lanes.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the company said it also pushed a technology that can detect whether subjects are wearing face masks. Face masks have been a point of contention on airplanes but remain a federal mandate until at least April 18.

"The units currently make scheduled and detection-based announcements directed toward our passengers and visitors," Rounds said. "Some of these focus on reducing vehicular congestion at our curb using [license plate](#) recognition and increasing federal mask compliance using [facial recognition](#) technology while others provide standard information."

The airport isn't paying for the kiosks now while it tests the capabilities, but Love Field did pay about \$4,000 to have them shipped to Texas.

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