



Face recognition set for takeoff in Australia

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Despite a series of technical hiccups, the first public trials of Australia's biometric SmartGate project are set to take place in Brisbane in August, six months behind schedule.

In development since 2002, [SmartGate](#) uses [facial-recognition technology](#) to verify the [identity of travelers](#) by comparing a scan of their face with a facial scan encoded in the microchip contained within the newly launched ePassport.

While [facial-scan technology has been successfully tested](#) in the Sydney and Melbourne airports, with Qantas staff and a select group of frequent flyers, integrating the e-passport readers and extending the technology to all travelers has proved more challenging.

Speaking at the annual [Biometrics Institute Australia Conference](#), project leader Gillian Savage of [Australian Customs Service](#) attributed the delays to unforeseen integration issues.

"We've had the booths and gates in place since the end of February, but through the testing, we discovered a whole range of issues around hardware and software," Savage said. "The biometric component of the gates is working well. Other issues are holding us back."

According to Savage, the challenges largely arose because of the dual-process design of the SmartGate system. This requires travelers to first submit their [ePassport](#) to a kiosk, where the passport information is scanned, and an exit ticket is issued. Passengers then proceed to the actual SmartGate, submit the ticket and have their biometrics tested against that contained in the [electronic passport](#).

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"We have three kiosks and two gates, and a lot of the challenges come from transferring information between those sites," Savage said. "We also need to make sure the technology will work for real travelers who might be tired, or might somehow damage their tickets before they get to the gates."

If successful, the public trials in Brisbane will be followed by the launch of the technology in the Sydney and Melbourne airports, also set for August. Participants of the current SmartGate trial, which has been running since 2002, will need to update their ePassports to continue to use the self-processing facilities.

"Initially the SmartGates will only be able to process Australian ePassport holders. However, we will open the service up to New Zealand ePassport holders as soon as possible after that," Savage said. "Other e-passport holders beyond that will require foreign-language support, but the SmartGate program will ultimately be open to all eligible e-passports from around the world."

ZDNet Australia is based in Sydney.

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