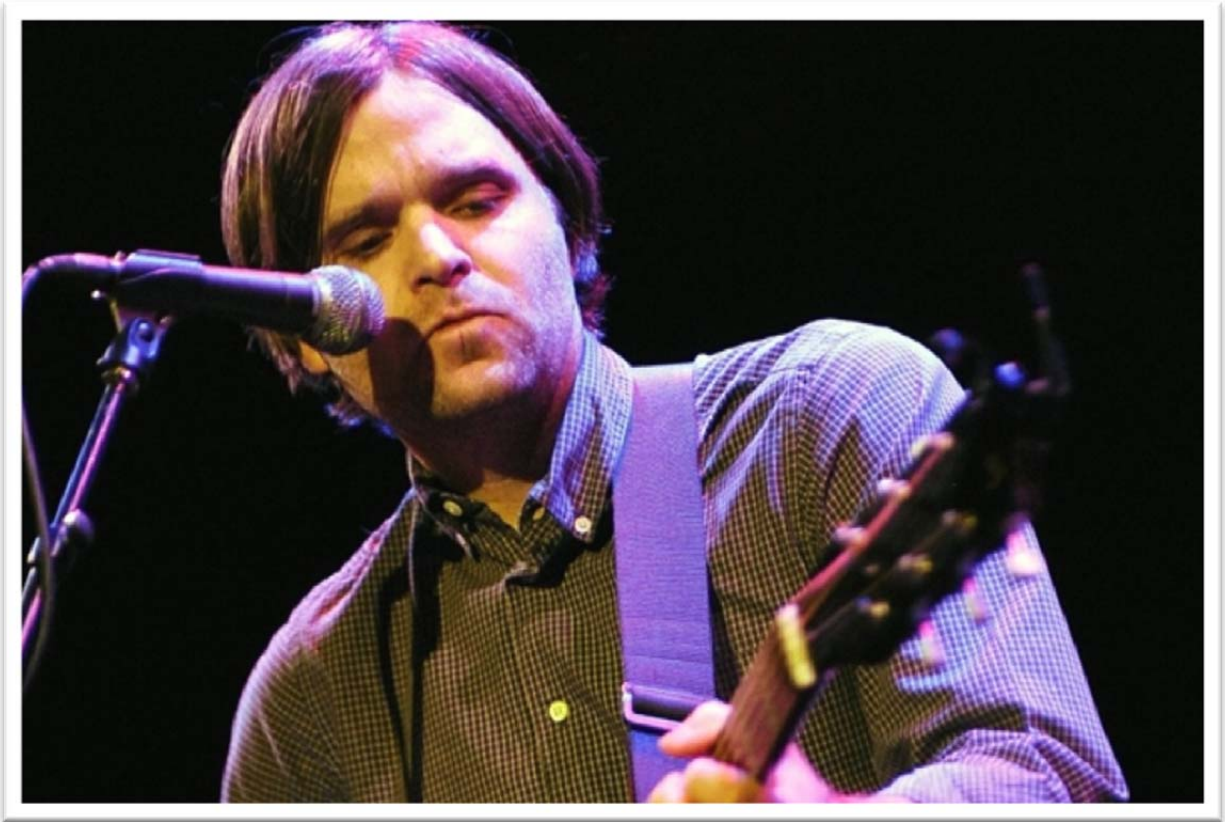


Getting there is half the fun, so the saying goes. Msnbc.com's travel team examines the issues of the day and, of course, the joy and hassle of traveling.

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Artists lend their voices to airport PSAs



Ben Gibbard of Death Cab for Cutie is one of the notable voices delivering public service announcements at Sea-Tac airport.

By Rob Lovitt, msnbc.com contributor

Do you find yourself tuning out those monotonous announcements at airports that welcome you to town, warn you about unattended packages and remind you about what you can and cannot bring through security?

Us, too, which may explain why more airports are turning to local celebrities to add a bit of fun and local flavor to their audio and video messaging. The latest is Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, which is unveiling a multi-channel program on Saturday featuring some of the hottest names in the Northwest music scene.

We're talking messages from the likes of Ben Gibbard (Death Cab for Cutie), hip-hopper Macklemore and grunge legend Jerry Cantrell, who alerts travelers to the airport's no-smoking policy with a decidedly sympathetic twist:

"This is Jerry Cantrell of Alice in Chains reminding you that smoking is allowed on the lower drive outside the building and only in designated areas ... Bummer, dude."

"We know folks are going to spend some time here — what they call 'dwell time' in the business — and we wanted to expose them to the musical history of the Northwest," said Sea-Tac spokesman Perry Cooper.

Sea-Tac, of course, is not the first airport to tap into the local cultural scene in an effort to create a connection between travelers and the local community.

In Branson, Mo., more than 80 local performers, including Jim Stafford, Andy Williams and the Lennon Sisters, have recorded welcome videos. And in Nashville, stars including Tim McGraw, Kristain Bush and Darius Rucker provide the voices for 30 PSAs covering everything from health tips to TSA rules.

"Airports are increasingly recognizing that they're viewed by passengers as the gateway to their communities," said Debby McElroy, executive vice president for the industry trade group Airports Council International - North America. "Having a local celebrity provide the announcements contributes to creating a unique experience of that airport."

For the Sea-Tac program, the Port of Seattle turned to Redmond, Wash.-based PlayNetwork, a creator of "original vibes" for more than 15,000 clients around the world. Working with the Seattle Music Commission and other groups, the company came up with a four-pronged program, which, given their local roots, they put together on a pro bono basis:

- safety, security and informational announcements by more than a dozen local performers and groups.
- overhead music featuring Northwest musicians from Ray Charles to Jimi Hendrix to Hey Marseilles.
- video segments on terminal monitors that tell stories about various elements of the local music scene.
- a web-based, multichannel music player available via the airport's free Wi-Fi.



"You can be sitting there, typing away on your laptop with your earbuds in and have a really cool, localized listening experience," said Nadine Zgonc, PlayNetwork's vice president of client management.

If successful, the Sea-Tac program may well represent the next generation of airport messaging, although it will still have to compete with the likes of Las Vegas, where the TSA pre-screening videos are provided by local entertainers, including Carrot Top (no big bags), Rita Rudner (no bomb jokes) and the sword-wielding knights from Excalibur (definitely no weapons).

"That's a great idea," said Zgonc. "We'll have to petition the Port on that one."

Rob Lovitt is a longtime travel writer who still believes the journey is as important as the destination. Follow him at [Twitter](#).