

Airport *report*

Air Service Soars at MSY

By Iftikhar Ahmad
Director of Aviation

While flight service in markets across the U.S. stall or decline, New Orleans continues to defy the national trend by tracking upward with new service and new flight opportunities. The air service statistics released for 2010 for Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport indicates that a post-Katrina record number of passengers flew through our airport. The volume for the year increased 5.1% to slightly over 8 million passengers exceeding the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) national growth projection of 2.8%. A variety of new non-stop air service destinations and air carriers in 2010 influenced the passenger growth in New Orleans. This included the return of pre-Katrina air carriers Frontier Airlines and Air Canada. Another boon to our list of international carriers is the introduction for the first time of WestJet, a low-cost Canadian carrier, to the New Orleans market.

Despite the facts, there are some misconceptions about our passenger levels. People talk about the capacity we have lost since Katrina, but consider this:

- National domestic enplanements have decreased from 726M in 2007 to an estimated 665M in 2010
- Census data shows that New Orleans has lost 30% of its population in last decade
- Gas prices per barrel (one of the biggest costs for airlines) went from \$29 to \$100 plus this last decade with significant impact on an airline's cost

With so many moving parts, how does one gauge where we are and where we should be? MSY went from the 39th busiest airport in 2004 (out of over 500 commercial airports) to 56th in 2006. The good news is that we are ascending back towards the 2004 mark. According to new data posted on the Department of Transportation (DOT) website, we moved up as the 43rd busiest in 2010. Considering we have lost 30% population and only lag by four spots to 2004 shows New Orleans' strength to attract passengers. This year the flight service report continues with positive stats. In January, enplanements were up 11.4% over January 2010, carrier operations averaged 120 per day versus 110 in January of last year and the total seat count for the month increased by 12% compared to January 2010. In February, non-stop service to San Francisco returned via United Airlines. Southwest Airlines has also announced additional service to begin this October to Baltimore-Washington and Nashville. Delta Air Lines has announced a new non-stop flight to Kansas City, Missouri beginning June 6 on their Embraer Regional Jet service, Delta Connection. This will give Armstrong International 2 daily flights to Kansas City, 5 to Washington, D.C. and 4 to Baltimore.

The first question one may ask is why the increase in service? I feel it can be contributed to the fact that our load factors (the number of people boarding an aircraft) are strong. When load factors are more than 90%, which is recently often the case at MSY, it means the aircrafts are full and the airlines are making money so they add more flights. Regardless, our strategy of continuous improvement dictates that we continue to market our City to airlines and attract more service to MSY.

In other news, Armstrong International Airport has received federal approval to serve as a port of entry for flights to and from Cuba. The airport received official notification from U.S. Customs and Border Protection that its application to serve as a gateway to Cuba was approved along with seven (7) other airports. Previously only Los Angeles (LAX), New York (JFK) and Miami (MIA) could provide service to Cuba. A local charter company, International Charters & Tours of Metairie (dba SupersaverTravel Cuba Travel - USA) asked the airport to apply. As we explore this opportunity, our airport will be willing to work with any airline or private charter who secures landing rights in Cuba. Although charter flights to and from Cuba will now be allowed, travel will be restricted to "purposeful" travel. Passengers must have close relatives in Cuba or must be involved in the medical or agricultural business sectors. Travel for education and religious activities is also permitted. There is no timeline set for when the first flight may operate.

As the convention and tourism travel to New Orleans rebounds with the economy, the New Orleans Aviation Board and staff will continue the pursuit of additional service from all of our carriers. In addition, we are in an on-going search for more international flights and new carriers, while the modernization of our airport continues with its multi-million dollar capital improvements. We are the gateway to the region and assume that role with great pride.✈



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Check your local listings for the air time of the Armstrong International Airport 30 minute television program, "Airport Alive," or view it on the airport website, www.flymsy.com by clicking on the "Airport Alive" link in News & Stats. You may also follow us on Twitter and Facebook.

