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New Report Documents Decline in Air Service Since 9/11

Travelers Face Reduced Schedules, Less Direct Flights

U.S. Urgently Needs More Transportation Options

Washington, D.C. – Air travel service nationwide declined since 9/11 with many large airports experiencing a decrease in the double digits -- nearly twice the reduction in demand -- according to a new report. The report concludes that 9/11 exposed the fault lines in an already faltering industry and that air travel will be unable to play its traditional role in the national transportation portfolio, as airlines continue to cut service to small and medium sized markets.

The impact has been even more severe on small and medium airports, with some airports like Santa Fe losing more than half its flights over the past year. Twenty-one airports have ended all scheduled service.

The report analyzes the loss in scheduled flights at over 500 airports across the United States. Boston Logan International Airport saw the largest reduction in weekly flights among large hubs with a loss of 23%. Other large airports with the most severe losses include Los Angeles International Airport (-20%), Newark International Airport (-20%), Washington Dulles International Airport (-20%) and Miami International Airport (-19%).

“The reduction in flights means travelers are being forced to take connecting flights instead of direct routes and have fewer flights to choose from when booking their trips,” said Hank Dittmar, co-director of Reconnecting America, the organization releasing the report. “These service cuts represent a fundamental restructuring of the air travel network, not a temporary adjustment.”

The reduction in air service reflects the financial reality of the nation’s big airlines. Pressure from low cost carriers has forced fares down even as airport charges and security costs are rising, making short and medium distance flights unprofitable. The report recommends a way out of this dilemma, noting that there are several markets where bus and rail provide an alternative. For example, the train is a popular alternative to get between Portland and Seattle, and New York and Washington. Offering train or bus service on shorter distance trips frees up air capacity for more profitable longer trips. The report also recommends connecting airports to rail (as is

already done in Europe, Japan and at Newark International) to make America's transportation more efficient and convenient.

The reduction in flights has eliminated service between several airport pairs. Travelers from Boston's Logan Airport can no longer fly directly to Austin, Texas. Direct service is no longer available from Washington, D.C.'s, Dulles Airport to Austin or Sacramento. And non-stop service is no longer available between LAX in Los Angeles to the California cities of Santa Rosa, Visalia and Merced, although they could be easily served by rail.

"The drop-off of flights has not only been a headache to travelers, but has cost cities that depend on the airports billions of dollars in lost jobs and tourism revenue," said Fort Worth Mayor Kenneth L. Barr, chair of the United States Conference of Mayors Transportation and Communications Committee. "This report highlights the need for a truly integrated inter-modal transportation system for the 21st century. Expanding rail options as we have done in the Fort Worth – Dallas region allows cities to recapture the losses in jobs and tourism."

The report also analyzes the reduction at service in small/medium airport hubs and non-hub commercial airports. Myrtle Beach saw the largest reduction in flights among all small and medium hub airports, with a loss of 36%. Other small and medium airports experiencing the heaviest flight reduction include Eugene, Oregon (-31%), West Palm Beach, Florida (-30%), Bangor, Maine (-29%), Raleigh/Durham, North Carolina (-29%) and Hilo, Hawaii (-27%).

Some of the most dramatic reductions in flight schedules have been seen at non-hub commercial airports like Worcester, Massachusetts, with a two-thirds reduction in weekly flights, and Santa Fe, New Mexico, with a 62% reduction. The loss of flights in Worcester, for example, has meant a loss of access to major airports like New York's Kennedy Airport, Chicago O'Hare and Orlando.

Even the airline trade group, the Air Transport Association (ATA), recognizes that this trend has reduced access to smaller and medium communities. In November 2002 ATA's President Carol Hallet warned, "As the industry continues to contract, smaller and mid-size communities will be disconnected from the national air transportation system – a system vital to their economic health."

"America's transportation system has entered a period of profound change. We need to solve the twin problems of obsolete airline and rail passenger business models in parallel to create a transportation network that meets the needs of the 21st century," said Anthony Perl, a report reviewer and Director of the City University of New York's Aviation Institute at York College.

Reconnecting America is calling for changes in government policy that would permit a closer integration of air with rail and bus and thereby creating a more financially stable transportation network, which will enable each transportation mode to serve the markets it's best suited for. The campaign is calling for an overhaul of the nation's transportation system when Congress reauthorizes funding for air, rail and highways next year.

The research team conducted an analysis of nearly 400,000 flights described in the Official Airline Guide (OAG) in examining comparable weeks during the fall of 2001 and 2002.

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The report and detailed information on more than 500 airports can be accessed online at www.reconnectingamerica.org

Missed Connections: Finding Solutions to the Crisis in Air Travel is the first in a series of reports from the Reconnecting America project which examines the current crisis in intercity travel in the U. S. and offers recommendations for a more economically stable and integrated system of U.S. travel. Reconnecting America seeks to redefine national policies for intercity travel in order to integrate our separately functioning aviation, passenger rail and intercity bus systems into a more convenient, secure, financially viable and sustainable network.