



# NON-STOP PARTY

## NEW DIRECT FLIGHTS BOOST BUSINESS

By Matt Ottinger

No man – or woman – is an island.

This may be the paraphrased title of a famous John Donne poem, but the sentiment also holds true for businesses. A company’s success is a culmination of support from its clients, suppliers and other partners. And without connectivity to those entities, a commercial enterprise will likely fail.

As Indiana’s largest airports continue to add non-stop flights, it’s that connectivity that will benefit Hoosier businesses.

Indianapolis International Airport, for instance, serves over seven million passengers per year, with an estimated 42% flying for business purposes. The airport has announced 19 new direct destinations since 2014, bringing its total of non-stop connections to 39, according to executive director Mario Rodriguez.

“There’s more traffic into Los Angeles, New York, Boston. Southwest (Airlines) is going after these strong business markets and it’s servicing our community right here,” he adds.

Southwest added new service to Boston and Los Angeles in June, and launched a new flight to Dallas in April.

“We’re seeing a change with Southwest from what was predominantly a leisure travel airline to more of a mainstream business airline, because they’re targeting big business markets,” Rodriguez points out. “We also have a new airline called OneJet, which is handling Milwaukee and Pittsburgh and will expand in the coming months. It’s a commercial service, but it’s on an executive jet so it’s a neat product used mostly by business travelers.”

He asserts that maintaining an “excellent” relationship with the business community is imperative for his airport, adding that focusing

on customer experience has led to its designation as the Best Airport in North America in the Airports Council International passenger survey in four of the last five years.

### A golden gateway

As Indianapolis’ tech scene continues to boom with start-ups and entrepreneurs dotting more of the landscape, access to San Francisco and Silicon Valley became an even stronger focus. In addition, one of Indiana’s most prominent companies, ExactTarget, was acquired by California-based Salesforce in 2013.

Backed by financial assurances from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation (\$1.5 million was placed in a reserve fund to pay the airline in the event annual revenue expectations from the



Indianapolis International Airport has earned top honors in passenger surveys for its convenient layout and attention to customer service.

flight were not met), United Airlines launched direct flights between Indianapolis and San Francisco in 2014. Upon the announcement of the new flight, former ExactTarget CEO Scott Dorsey said the flight would be “a game changer for the tech community” and estimated the flights would largely be filled with collaborating Salesforce employees.

Salesforce Marketing Cloud’s current CEO, Scott McCorkle, contends the flights are a needed bridge for Central Indiana’s entire tech community.

“Technology innovation is happening around the world,” he says. “By providing direct and convenient access to Indianapolis, we have the opportunity to participate in a global tech movement. Indy is quickly becoming a hub for innovation – attracting venture capital firms, tech companies and top talent from around the world to our great city.”

**Connections**

A 2012 economic impact study by the Aviation Association of Indiana and Conexus Indiana revealed Indiana’s 69 public-use airports contribute \$14.1 billion in economic output and provide more than 69,000 jobs in the state.

South Bend International alone reports a \$1.7 billion impact on its area economy.

“This airport is a multimodal facility, with aviation (three major airlines) and a South Shore train that goes back and forth between here and downtown Chicago,” outlines Mike Daigle, executive director. “We also have interstate and intrastate bus service from the airport terminal, and a city bus service provided by the city of South Bend. There are people who ride the train from Michigan City to South Bend, then get on an airplane to go to their destination, then come



Travelers using Evansville Regional Airport are privy to easy terminal access. The airport now partners with an auto mechanic so passengers can have their cars repaired during business trips.

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Another Northern Indiana hub, Fort Wayne International Airport, continues to see passenger numbers climb.

“In 2014, we were up 8.4%, and we’ve been up for five years in a row,” quantifies Scott Hinderman, executive director of airports for the Fort Wayne-Allen County Airport Authority. “Year to date, we’re doing really well, and after spring break we were at 17% growth. We’ve had a very favorable 2015 so far.”

American Airlines added non-stop flights from Fort Wayne to Charlotte and Philadelphia last October, and United added an additional flight to Chicago. Delta also added a fourth flight to Atlanta last year, while making Minneapolis a year-round destination.

“If you look at the legacy carriers (such as Delta, United and American Airlines), I think all that activity is driven by the business community,” Hinderman surmises. “People can use that for leisure, but it’s business-driven, value-added.”

Looking South, Evansville Regional Airport added three new United Airlines flights to Chicago in June, in addition to expanded service to Charlotte last fall.

“One factor in us getting new service is that we finished our runway project a year ahead of schedule last fall,” explains Doug Joest, executive director. “It was a \$66 million project because we had to relocate the runway. United told us the timing of getting that done had a lot to do with the announcement of their new service.”

He explains the airport will vigorously track the usage of the new Chicago flights to determine success, and Joest has been happy with the Charlotte service thus far. (He adds that access to Charlotte gives travelers an alternative to connecting via Atlanta.) The access will undoubtedly benefit the airport’s top commercial users.

“Businesses of all sizes use our airport,” Joest reports. “We’ve got several of the large names like Berry Plastics Corporation, Mead Johnson Nutrition, Alcoa, Old National Bank – and we have two health care organizations and two universities here, and a lot of small businesses.”

## Polishing the (Big) Apple

New York City is often regarded as the world’s business capital, so it’s no surprise it’s a desired destination for Indiana companies.



Fort Wayne International Airport pulls passengers from an expansive region that includes portions of Ohio and Michigan.

That’s why South Bend International recently added service to New York/Newark via United.

“(Gaining access to) the New York market was driven primarily by the business community,” Daigle relays. “Most of the major corporations in town have some affiliation to New York or a reason to do business in that area. In our area, there is a huge educational component in our market and (school employees) do travel quite a bit, and we have some of the aerospace (companies) continuing to grow. Some are using Newark to connect to other locations along the eastern seaboard too.”

## Overcoming turbulence

While adding direct service is an ongoing effort for most airports, it’s not without its challenges.

“Every airport in the country wants to grow, even those in Chicago (O’Hare International Airport) and Atlanta (Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport) – the two busiest airports in the United States,” Daigle imparts. “The challenges we see in the future continue to be the amount of aircraft available to be spread across the U.S. If we have a limited number of airlines, do they have the capacity to do these things? One of the concerns we have is if the needs we have for the community can be met by an existing or new airline in the future.”

Daigle reveals Dallas/Fort Worth would be the next priority for service from

South Bend.

“We have many companies that have connections to that area and it would be a great location for companies to connect to the West Coast or Central and South America, as we have companies connected to those areas as well. We’re working right now to finalize what the number of passengers on an annual basis would be for those destinations.”

Hinderman concurs that airline consolidations are changing the landscape of an evolving industry, but believes enhancing business travel is still possible. Namely, he contends providing first-class seating is critical for business customers, as is maintaining frequency.

“Sometimes airlines increase the size of aircraft at some airports, but when they do they reduce the number of departures per day,” he explains. “We don’t want that, and I believe frequency is important because of the convenience factor.”

He adds that preparation is critical when making that case for new service.

“You have to do some of the homework so you can get in front of (the airlines’ decision makers),” Hinderman concludes. “If you’re willing to take some measured risk and be bold and do some of the homework and put that package together on why it would work for the community, you make a compelling story for the airlines to start service.”

**RESOURCES:** Mike Daigle, South Bend International Airport, at [www.flysb.com](http://www.flysb.com) | Scott Hinderman, Fort Wayne International Airport, at [www.fwairport.com](http://www.fwairport.com) | Doug Joest, Evansville Regional Airport, at [www.evairport.com](http://www.evairport.com) | Mario Rodriguez, Indianapolis International Airport, at [www.indianapolisairport.com](http://www.indianapolisairport.com)