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Viewpoint

Dennis Yablonsky: Expanded air service: Use it or you'll lose it

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Is Pittsburgh well-connected to the outside world? That's a reasonable question, especially if you head up or are employed by a global company with operations here or one that's considering the region for a new investment or expansion. Similarly, someone who's thinking about relocating to the region for work or higher education is also probably thinking about connectedness.

Fortunately, the answer to the question is that the Pittsburgh region is better connected than it has been in decades, particularly on the international front. This is due, in large part, to one of our key regional transportation assets, Pittsburgh International Airport – Air Transport World's "Airport of the Year" for 2017 – and the strategic private- and public-sector partnerships and collaborations that are helping to continually improve air service in our region.

Support for air service is not new to the Allegheny Conference on Community Development agenda. We've been working closely for more than a decade with the Allegheny County Airport Authority to identify opportunities for new service and jointly market these opportunities to airlines.

Over the past two years, however, PIT and our region have seen a dramatic acceleration of air service options. Nonstop destinations have increased 84 percent, from 37 to 68.



Dennis Yablonsky

"Time is money," so the adage goes, and there's no denying that business and leisure travelers' time is valuable. No one enjoys the stress of connecting flights and the lost time (and sometimes lost baggage) that can result. Flying nonstop streamlines getting from one place to another and allows travelers to maximize on-the-ground time at their final destinations.

Just last month, air service expansion plans caught a strong tail wind when PIT added three new carriers. Among these were Condor Airlines and Wow air, which both launched service from PIT in June, addressing a critical need of our region's business community: more options for nonstop travel abroad.

Iceland-based Wow is flying between PIT and Keflavík International Airport in Reykjavik, Iceland's capital, four times per week, year-round, and five times per week in 2017 from its inaugural flights until Oct. 2.

In just five hours from PIT, travelers touch down in Reykjavik at a highly navigable airport not unlike PIT. From there one can make easy, nonstop connections to more than 20 major European cities, including Amsterdam; Barcelona, Spain; Berlin; London; Paris; Milan and Stockholm.

Now connecting Pittsburgh to Frankfurt, Germany, one of the world's top 10 financial centers, is Condor Airlines. This seasonal nonstop service to Germany is a first for the region since 2004 and has been much sought after by our business community, which is not surprising considering the level of German foreign direct investment in our region. From Frankfurt, Condor offers connections to 197 international destinations in 78 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

In addition to the established seasonal nonstop service to Paris and beyond on Delta Air Lines, having more options for easier, economical and efficient access to Europe and beyond is a benefit to our business community.

The Allegheny Conference recognizes the importance of generating support for these vital nonstop connections across the Atlantic and is committed to helping build a momentum that will attract even more robust air service in the future. Under the banner of the Pittsburgh Travel Cooperative, we're doing our part alongside the airport authority, Pittsburgh Technology Council and VisitPittsburgh.

To keep the air service we have – and get more – we need to take advantage of it. The service is here, in part, because of the business community's requests, and I encourage that cohort, as well as our region's leisure travelers, to use it so that we don't lose it. There's really nowhere to go but up by attracting even more service from other carriers – if our region can prove that its people will support it.