



News Clip

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As flights added, air passengers through Miami International Airport soar 7% this year

By Ashley D. Torres

A Miami International Airport passenger boom boosted aloft in 2010 by 30 additional American Airlines flights, new international routes and airport improvements just keeps rising.

More visitors keep coming in 2011, even as American, Delta and various foreign airlines line up new flights. However, rising gas prices could burst the expanding passenger bubble.

Total air passengers here hit an all-time high in 2010, climbing 5.35% year over year to 35.7 million from 33.9 million in 2009.

The rising numbers continue into 2011, with traveler arrivals climbing 4.7% year over year in January to 1.586 million from 1.515 million in January 2010.

Even that is speeding up. Passenger numbers from Jan. 1 to March 7 rose 7%, said José Abreu, Miami-Dade aviation director, smashing previous forecasts that traveler numbers would remain flat in 2010 and pick up only 2% in 2011.

With 98% of Miami-Dade visitors arriving by air and 75% flying American Airlines, said William D. Talbert III, the Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau's CEO, increasing flights mean more travelers.

American Airlines has been a primary contributor to the traveler rise, with 30 new daily flights in 2010.

"Some people," Mr. Abreu said, "build new airports to get 30 new flights."

New international routes, such as Transaero's twice-weekly service to Moscow Domodedovo Airport and airberlin's November commencement of four weekly flights to Berlin, added to the passenger rise.

It is "really a testament to the strength of the [Miami] brand," Mr. Talbert said, "that these airlines are adding service."

Nonetheless, there are concerns that rising gas prices could stall increases in airport travelers as, Mr. Abreu said, the airline model can't handle oil prices above \$100 per barrel.

According to Bloomberg, Tuesday's New York Mercantile Exchange crude oil future was \$104.45 per barrel.

Despite these concerns, additional flights from Miami are to begin in coming months.

American is to add more flights to Baltimore, Los Angeles and Madrid in April followed by increased service to St. Thomas and St. Croix in June.

American Eagle, American's regional affiliate, is also to increase flights in April linking to La Romana (Casa de Campo), Dominican Republic, to five times a week.

Delta Air Lines is to commence four daily Jacksonville roundtrips, one daily to London and five daily to Orlando and Tampa on March 26. Delta, according to the Official Airline Guide, is also to relocate to Miami its daily Los Angeles service from Fort Lauderdale Hollywood International Airport.

For foreign air providers, Iberia Airlines is to begin three weekly nonstop Barcelona flights on March 29. Service linking to Amsterdam is to begin March 21 on KLM Airlines with four weekly nonstop flights and on Arkefly beginning June 24. TAP Portugal is also to start flights to Lisbon Portela Airport.

Airport officials say improvements also contributed to increasing passenger numbers, such as construction of the Miami Intermodal Center, which features the rental car center, MIA Mover and Miami Central Station.