

Frontier Airlines adds Provo route

Genelle Pugmire - Daily Herald | Posted: Wednesday, March 2, 2011 12:25 am

PROVO -- Denver-based Frontier Airlines has announced it will start providing the first scheduled commercial air travel out of the Provo airport in June, according to Mayor John Curtis and Frontier executives. The announcement comes after several years of strategic planning, airport improvements and a \$500,000 grant from the FAA last fall that helped forward negotiations.

"This is a longed-for day," Curtis said. "I truly believe this is a game changer."

While rumors have been flying throughout the area for days, the official announcement came during Tuesday's Provo Municipal Council meeting. City officials have been in talks with a number of different airlines for more than a year; Frontier was No. 1 on airport manager Steve Gleason's list a year ago, and Provo was on Frontier's list as well.

"This is a major milestone for Provo and all of Utah County," Curtis said. "Many people have worked very hard, not just in the last few months, but also in the last several years, to make this happen."

"This area has interesting market potential. We will launch one flight a day, but this could turn into a lot more. But first this has to work," said Daniel Shurz, vice president of strategy and planning for Frontier. "We are encouraging residents to come fly with us."

Mike Fergus with the Federal Aviation Administration told the Daily Herald there has been no official contact with Frontier for a route between Provo and Denver, although officials are aware that there has been talk of that move. The FAA won't take official action until receiving a letter of intent from Frontier. According to Gleason they have received the letter late Tuesday, and Frontier will get the letter today.

The scheduled flight would leave at 8:30 a.m. each day with a return flight at 9:15 p.m. daily on Frontier's 99-seat Embraer 190 regional jet, according to company officials. The target date for service to begin is June 20, with the first flight from Provo Municipal Airport on June 21. Special promotional prices for the first while will also be appealing to those wanting to travel to and from Denver, or use Denver as a connector to places such as New York, Dallas-Ft. Worth, Atlanta, Chicago and Orlando.

Shurz said that Denver is the largest regional airline market and is also Frontier's main hub. "We are a commuter's low-cost airline, and we deliver good prices. If successful, we promise you more than one flight," he said.

For Gleason, this is the result of several months and years of hard work and a keen desire to put the airport and the city on the map.

"This has been a goal of mine from the time I started at the airport 12 years ago. Many people have worked for a long time to upgrade this airport, to make it more safe, more efficient," Gleason said. "One of the



positive spinoffs of this work is that the airport is now in a position to be a strong economic engine for the valley. A strong contribution to Provo city and Utah Valley has always been our goal at the airport, but commercial service was always out there in the distance, like light at the end of a long, long tunnel."

Frontier executives met recently in Provo with a handful of local business owners, pilots and civic leaders to hear first hand what Frontier might expect from them as far as flying customers from the area.

Dann Shumway, airside operations specialist at the airport, has been working with Gleason on the project. "When I started here 27 years ago, you could hardly see the runway for the overgrown vegetation," Shumway said. "Back then, you couldn't imagine something like this, but the way this valley is growing, commercial air service from Provo is a logical step. This will be great for Utah County."

Mark Openshaw, local businessman and member of the airport board said, "I have a business partner in Castlerock, Colorado. I'd love to see this service."

Nu Skin, the fifth-largest employer in Provo, expects its distributors to make good use of the new air service. "We have 800,000 distributors that fly in all the time for conventions and meetings," said Gary Garrett, vice president of Nu Skin.

Million Air currently owns the airport terminal, and services will be contracted by Frontier Airlines to ticket passengers, load luggage and help board planes.

"This is a strong area for commercial service," said James E. Sirhall of the Airport Development Group based in Denver. "We're looking for things to happen. We hope people will use the service. Using it will mean more service and more airlines."

Airport board member Lon Woodard said he wants to be on Frontier's first plane out of Provo.

"Mayor Curtis and his staff worked very hard to bring commercial air service to Provo," stated U.S. Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah. "Last fall, when I spoke with Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood about Provo, I told him about the city's commitment to making the airport a viable candidate for commercial service. I was encouraged when Provo was selected to receive a federal grant that would allow for important improvements to be made to the airport. Regular air service between Provo and Denver gives Utah County and central Utah better connectivity to the rest of the country. This can only improve the quality of life and help ensure the economic stability of our state."

Tickets will be available for purchase beginning today at FrontierAirlines.com.

• Daily Herald reporter **Heidi Toth** contributed to this story.