

The Hawk Eye

LOCAL

Burlington airport now appears on American Airlines website for flights after Feb. 1

Laigha Anderson The Hawk Eye

Published 1:37 p.m. CT Dec. 2, 2021

Burlington is officially an American Airlines city.

As of Thursday morning, Burlington was listed as a destination on the airline's website, with travelers able to book flights that take off on or after Feb. 1.

“We have a lot of people who seem to be excited about the news and are looking forward to it,” said Sara Sandburg, director of the Southeast Iowa Regional Airport.

Burlington is able to have a commercial airport through the Essential Air Service program. The program is part of the Department of Transportation's attempt to connect those living in rural areas to the rest of the country by subsidizing flights out of those airports.

Burlington's airport is governed, and partially funded, by local tax dollars. The airport is funded by Burlington, West Burlington and Des Moines County. Each entity appoints members to the airport's board.

Every few years, the board must decide who will service the Burlington area. Out of several competitors, the airport board chose Cape Air, a smaller airline that works with American and whose flights can be booked through the American Airlines site. The airline also code-shares with American, meaning Cape Air flights are advertised as being American Airline flights operated by Cape Air.

“With the baggage and the ticketing code-share, it is a plus and a win-win for everyone,” Sandburg said. “I think it is exciting (travelers) will have a full-service carrier.”

Before working with Cape Air, the airport contracted with Air Choice One. Board member Charlie Walsh said Air Choice had said it would be getting articulation agreements with other airlines to transfer baggage, but that never came through.

“That was something a lot of people wanted,” Walsh explained.

Another difference passengers will notice is that they will not be flying on a Cessna plane, as they had with Air Choice, but a P2012 Traveller plane. The Traveller plane was created by the Italian company Tecnam specifically for Cape Air and seats nine passengers. Cape Air currently does fly some Cessna 402 planes, which hold eight passengers, but the airline is slowly replacing them with the Tecnam models.

The Traveller planes are weight-balanced aircraft, meaning they have a specified weight limit. That means flyers cannot choose their seat. Instead, passengers are assigned a seat at the gate before the plane takes off to ensure the plane is properly balanced. A similar rule is in effect for Air Choice One’s Cessna planes.

The Traveller planes have USB charging ports for passengers to use, as long as those devices remain in Airplane mode.

One thing that won't change is the destination. Cape Air will still be flying direct to Chicago and St Louis only. Residents can book connecting flights to anywhere in the world, but now they can have a single ticket if they remain with American.

“Our airport board made a great decision. I am interested their connection with American Airlines and the benefits that come along with that,” Burlington Mayor Jon Billups said.

Flights to Chicago and Saint Louis will be \$49, including taxes and fees, and only have one flying option. Air Choice offered "Business" and "Every Day" fares at different rates.

There will be 12 flights per week between Burlington and Chicago or St. Louis.

About Cape Air, which began in Massachusetts and is active in Midwest

Cape Air was founded in 1989 by Dan Wolfe, with its first flight between the Massachusetts cities of Boston and Provincetown. It has grown to fly out of more than 37 destinations, including a number in the Caribbean, and serves about 500,000 passengers each year.

Its major markets are Montana, Midwest, Northeast and the Caribbean. All markets served in the Midwest are part of the Essential Air Service program and connect to a major hub, namely St. Louis and Chicago.

Other Midwest Essential Air Service cities include Quincy, Illinois, and Kirksville, Missouri. Stacie Schuchardt, Midwest marketing manager for Cape Air, said it made sense to bid on

Burlington as it would be easy to move pilots between those three cities.

Cape Air operates some American Airlines flights throughout the country. Cape Air allows passengers to book through its website. Cape Air flights are also listed on deal comparison sites, such as Orbitz and Expedia.