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SIOUX GATEWAY AIRPORT

EXCLUSIVE: American's Sioux City flights start April 3

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By Dave Dreeszen ddreeszen@siouxcityjournal.com | Posted: Monday, January 16, 2012 6:00 am | (7) Comments

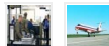
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Journal file photo by Jim Lee Passengers go through security at Sioux Gateway Airport in September. American Eagle, a regional carrier of American Airlines, will start offering two daily connecting flights between Sioux City and Chicago O'Hare International Airport on April 3.



SIOUX CITY -- A regional affiliate of American Airlines will begin offering two daily flights between Sioux City and Chicago on April 3.

American Eagle is expected to announce this morning the startup date for its new federally-subsidized service at Sioux Gateway Airport.

Eagle will operate the nonstop routes with 44-seat Embraer jets. Daily departures to Chicago are planned at 6:30 a.m. and 3:10 p.m., with return trips arriving in Sioux City at 2:35 p.m. and 9 p.m. It's about a 90-minute flight between the two Midwest cities.

American, the third-largest U.S. airline, was expected to add the new Sioux City flights to its online reservation system Sunday night.

"This schedule will allow customers throughout northern Iowa to make a day trip to Chicago for business or connect through this key international gateway to destinations throughout the American Airlines and one world global network," said Gary Foss, American's managing director for regional commercial services, in a statement.

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American Eagle flights

Beginning April 3, American Eagle will offer two daily flights between Sioux Gateway Airport and Chicago O'Hare International Airport.

Departures to Chicago -- 6:30 a.m. and 3:10 p.m.

Arrivals in Chicago -- 8:05 a.m. and 4:40 p.m.

Departures to Sioux City -- 1 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

Arrivals in Sioux City -- 2:35 p.m. and 9 p.m.

Eagle will receive an annual subsidy of \$1.51 million for two years under an Essential Air Service contract it signed last month with the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Delta Air Lines, currently the only carrier serving Sioux Gateway, was the only other bidder for the subsidy.

The DOT is requiring Delta to keep flying its twice-daily routes between Sioux Gateway and Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport until Eagle starts service.

Delta, the nation's largest carrier, has not officially said if it will exit the market after Eagle arrives. Atlanta-based Delta has previously said it could no

longer afford to fly at Sioux Gateway without a federal subsidy. A check of Delta's reservation system last Friday listed Sioux City flights for April 3 and other dates that week.

A Delta spokesperson did not immediately return a call to the Journal.

The Sioux City Council and the board for the city-owned airport both endorsed Eagle's bid, saying the O'Hare routes could help bolster Sioux Gateway's traffic.

Among Siouxland air travelers, Chicago is the top destination. Sioux Gateway lost its nonstop service to the Windy City in the mid-1990s.

"We feel we will get back many of the people who were using other airports because there wasn't a quick route to Chicago," said Sioux Gateway marketing director Barbara Sloniker.

If traffic warrants, local leaders believe Eagle also will eventually add a second hub, such as Dallas-Fort Worth, where American is headquartered.

Eagle begins its service in Sioux City as its parent company, AMR Corp., reorganizes under federal bankruptcy protection. Saddled with high labor costs and mounting debt, AMR filed for Chapter 11 on Nov. 28, in the midst of the EAS selection process.

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