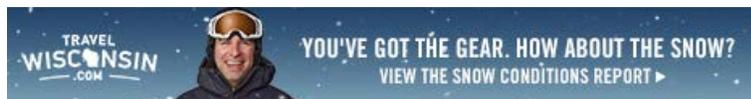


FEBRUARY 4, 2014

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## Great Lakes ends airline service to Iowa cities today

 February 1, 2014 By [Radio Iowa Contributor](#)

Great Lakes Airlines is suspending its passenger service to several midwestern cities today, including two Iowa communities, Fort Dodge and Mason City. Rhonda Chambers, director of the Fort Dodge Regional Airport, says there's a lot of paperwork involved in finding a replacement airline. Chambers says, "We're working with the U.S. Department of Transportation trying to find out how they're going to get us a request for proposal so we can actually go out and talk to airlines to either have Great Lakes come back with a different model or go to another air carrier."

The airports won't close with the loss of the carrier as corporate flights and private, or general aviation, flights will continue. Chambers says she's heard from frustrated customers who depend on aviation service to and from Fort Dodge. Some are half-way through trips and with Great Lakes flights ending tomorrow, they're might find themselves stuck. Chambers says, "If you booked your ticket on Delta.com out of Fort Dodge, Delta has been very good about re-accommodating your schedule as far as if you have a flight in the future."

Pam Osgood, manager of the Mason City Municipal Airport, says it will not be a quick process to find a replacement airline. "It could be two months before we're able to find another carrier," Osgood says. "It just depends on how fast the request for proposals can be sent out and air carriers responding to that. More than likely it will take several months to get another air carrier in place."

Great Lakes is suspending the service, citing the unintended consequences of a new federal mandate that requires pilots on small airlines to have 1,500 hours of experience, up from 500 hours. The new regulation caused many pilots to flock to jobs with major airlines due to higher salaries. Great Lakes had more than 300 pilots a year ago, but now has fewer than 100, leaving it unable to staff all its routes.

Osgood says it's a national trend. "The pilot rule that was enacted does put smaller markets in jeopardy," Osgood says, "but we remain hopeful that we will be able to secure an air carrier that is willing to come in and provide service to Mason City." Service from Great Lakes had been an issue since the carrier took over for Delta in April of 2012. Passenger levels at Mason City's airport in 2012 dropped below 10-thousand for the first time since 1987, with a total under 59-hundred. Last year, that number dipped to just over three-thousand.

*(Reporting by Bob Fisher, KRIB, Mason City/Pat Powers, KQWC, Webster City)*

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