

THE Messenger

Jet service may return to FD Regional Airport

Commission endorses SkyWest plan



-Messenger file photo

The Sun Country Airlines planes that carry the Brushy Creek Area Honor Flight to Washington, D.C., might be joined by other jets at the Fort Dodge Regional Airport next year. SkyWest has proposed serving the airport with 50-passenger jets.

People would be able to fly to and from the Fort Dodge Regional Airport on jets beginning next year under a proposal endorsed by the airport commission Monday evening.

SkyWest, operating jets capable of seating 50 people, would provide 12 round trips a week between Fort Dodge and Chicago O'Hare International Airport, according to the plan.

That carrier would be operating the jets for United Airlines. That arrangement would provide Fort Dodge passengers with seamless connections to other United flights to destinations around the world.

“You would fly to Chicago, go to your next United gate and your bags would be transferred over,” said Rhonda Chambers, the airport’s director of aviation. *“You would buy one United ticket.”*

Fort Dodge passengers have not had that kind of seamless airline connection since 2012, when Delta Air Lines served the city.

Air Choice One, the only carrier now serving the airport, operates turbo prop planes that seat eight to nine people. It offers flights to Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport in Minnesota, Lambert St. Louis International Airport in Missouri and Chicago O’Hare International Airport. However, when passengers arrive at those airports they have to get their bags and go check in with another airline.

Air Choice One serves Fort Dodge with the aid of a federal subsidy provided by the Essential Air Service program. That program’s money helps to ensure commercial air service continues to the nation’s smaller communities.

Air Choice One has a contract with the Essential Air Service program that expires at the end of February 2021.

The U.S. Department of Transportation solicited proposals from carriers interested in serving Fort Dodge.

Four proposals were received. They came from SkyWest, Air Choice One, Key Lime Air and Boutique Air.

Air Choice One offered essentially its current service. Key Lime Air proposed to use nine seat planes to fly to Minneapolis-St. Paul and St. Louis. Boutique Air proposed using nine-seat planes to fly to

Minneapolis-St. Paul, Chicago O'Hare and St. Louis.

Chambers said SkyWest sent representatives to Fort Dodge to check out the airport.

A committee consisting of Chambers; Mayor Matt Bemrich; City Manager David Fierke; Airport Commissioner Deb Johnson; Airport Commissioner Dean Getting; Dennis Plautz, chief executive officer of the Greater Fort Dodge Growth Alliance; and Kelly Halsted, economic development director of the Growth Alliance; reviewed the proposals. The group recommended SkyWest.

In picking SkyWest, the committee listed several reasons including:

∫ Use of 50-seat jets.

∫ Seamless transitions for passengers to more than 620 United flights to 175 destinations.

∫ The airline's 47 years of service and multiple awards.

On Monday, the airport commission voted unanimously to endorse the committee's recommendation, asking the Department of Transportation to award the Essential Air Service contract to SkyWest.

Local officials will learn later this month to whom the federal officials award the contract.

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