



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
November 9th, 2021

CONTACT:
Natalie Peterson, Duluth Airport Authority
Director of Communications & Marketing
218-625-7768

DULUTH INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT AIR SERVICE UPDATE

Duluth, MN — Duluth International Airport (DLH) has seen a comeback in passenger numbers in 2021 after facing a hard year with COVID-19 in 2020. To date, passenger numbers are at 69% compared to 2019 which had the highest passenger numbers in the last decade. Along with passenger traffic returning, we have seen some frequencies return to what is considered normal. We have also made exciting new air service announcements with the new Sun Country service offering twice weekly direct flights to Phoenix, AZ and Ft. Myers, FL. These are positive steps forward, but this doesn't paint the entire picture of the struggles that commercial air service and DLH are facing with the existing pilot shortage.

Communities around the country have seen a slow return of routes and frequencies to their airports. Delta has consistently serviced DLH with four to five frequencies per day since the beginning of 2021. United Airlines has fluctuated daily flights ranging from three to one flight. For the month of November, United will operate with one daily flight to Chicago. However, starting in December, this will go to two flights daily. The reason for the change isn't due to passenger demand, it is due to a pilot shortage.

For perspective United Airlines regional jet flying is down 27.37% in November compared to November 2019. United Airlines has recently announced the elimination of service at 13 airports: Quincy, IL (UIN), Rochester, MN (RST), Mammoth Lakes, CA (MMH), Monroe, LA (MLU), Lansing, MI (LAN), Killeen-Fort Hood, TX (GRK), Fayetteville, NC (FAY), Evansville, IN (EVV), Wausau, WI (CWA), Columbia, MO (COU), College Station, TX (CLL) and Kalamazoo, MI (AZO). There are two factors driving these decisions - pilot shortages and business travel is not bouncing back as quickly as expected. While nationwide carriers are still expecting overall traffic to get back to 2019 levels by year-end 2022, this could vary greatly by market.

Throughout the industry, there were strong predictions of a significant pilot shortage that would impact commercial air service even prior to the pandemic. 2020 was a challenging year for this industry with airlines struggling to control costs due to the financial impact of COVID-19 related shutdowns. Airlines offered early retirements and buy-outs to employees. Based on public reports, it has been estimated that as many as 10% of US pilots took early retirement during the crisis. With the recent return of demand, this creates a gap that makes it difficult for airlines to meet steadily increasing demand. According to Boeing's 2021 Pilot outlook 130,000 new pilots will be needed to fly and maintain the US commercial aviation fleet over the next 20 years. Overall employment of airline and commercial pilots is estimated to grow 6% from 2018 to 2028, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

DLH is seeing business travel start to return and continued growth in our leisure market. We have maintained service to two major hubs with both Delta and United and are excited to offer the new Sun Country direct service for our leisure market. DLH also recently announced the successful award of a Small Community Air Service Development Grant (SCASD) to secure direct service to Denver. With that said, it is more important than ever that the region continue to choose to fly local for their travels. It is critical that we continue to demonstrate demand to our airline partners to retain our existing service and continue commercial air service's recovery in our region.

About Duluth International Airport

The new state-of-the-art passenger terminal at the Duluth International Airport opened for business on January 14, 2013. Currently, United Airlines offers daily nonstop flights to Chicago and Delta offers daily nonstop flights to Minneapolis/St. Paul. Sun Country will begin direct service to Ft. Myers and Phoenix beginning December 17th, 2021 with flights operating on Fridays and Mondays. We are committed to providing our customers with superior services in a safe, secure and professional environment. Be sure to visit our Club DLH Business Suite, designed with the working traveler in mind. Visit duluthairport.com, follow us on Twitter @DuluthAirport, and like us on [facebook.com/duluthairport](https://www.facebook.com/duluthairport).