

Delta Returns to Growth In Seattle

(Courtesy of Marissa Nall, Reporter, Puget Sound Business Journal)

Delta Air Lines Inc. (NYSE: DAL) is back on its pre-pandemic growth trajectory at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, as strong leisure demand offsets a slower recovery for international flights.

The Atlanta-based company expects to restore some key destinations for business travelers from Seattle in the coming months, including three California destinations: Sacramento, San Jose and Orange County.

It also plans to double service to Cincinnati in June, increase flights to Denver and expand its footprint in Alaska with three year-round destinations using larger aircraft.

Overall, the company expects to make 151 daily departures from Seattle to 51 total destinations by this summer. That's a return to the number of markets it served in the summer of 2019, though short of its 170 daily flights at the time.

The growth comes even as the airline [pared back its July and August schedules](#) by around 7,600 flights nationwide, as it aims to provide more "resilience" and reliability across its operations. None of the cuts were to Seattle-area flights.

Delta has made moves to triple its capacity to Florida in recent weeks, including the return of its longest domestic flight — Seattle to Fort Lauderdale — beginning in December.

"We're back on our pre-pandemic trajectory of wanting to continue to grow and invest in the Seattle market," [Eric Beck](#), managing director of Delta's network planning team, told the Business Journal.

Despite what could be its fastest-ever pace of hiring, Beck said challenges such as staffing and weather have made responding to the renewed demand difficult. SeaTac-based carrier Alaska Airlines, for example, canceled around [4% of its planned flights](#) in May and scaled back its summer growth plans amid a shortfall of trained pilots.

"We're trying to take a very strategic and measured approach to how we bring back capacity," Beck said. "We're trying to stay very closely coordinated across the company to make sure that we are not putting out a schedule that we can't deliver for our customers."

Delta is the second-largest carrier at Sea-Tac Airport, behind Alaska, accounting for about 20% of passenger volume in March, the most recent data available.

International travel is still constrained by Covid-19 restrictions abroad, but Seattle remains an important international gateway for Delta, Beck said. The airline expects to see travel to Europe outpace that of 2019 by 50%.

While flights to Asia have returned more slowly, Delta resumed daily flights to Seoul, South Korea, with 35% more seats. It also sees potential for growth with its daily service to Tokyo-Haneda Airport.

Since the pandemic, the airline has also seen more demand for sunny international destinations such as Mexico beaches, Beck said. As bookings return, premium seats and products are outperforming demand for main cabin bookings, he added. So even as the airline restores capacity, it has accelerated decisions that remove main cabin and economy seats from its planes in favor of options with extra legroom or reclining seats.