THE VALUE OF AIR TRANSPORT IN THE UNITED STATES

2019
The air transport sector makes a major contribution to the United States’ economy

There are different ways of measuring air transport’s impact on an economy. We look at three: the jobs and spending generated by airlines and their supply chain, the flows of trade, tourism and investment resulting from users of all airlines serving the country, and the city pair connections that make these flows possible. All provide a different but illuminating perspective on the importance of air transport.

The air transport sector supports jobs...

Airlines, airport operators, airport on-site enterprises (restaurants and retail), aircraft manufacturers, and air navigation service providers employ 2.2 million people in the United States. In addition, by buying goods and services from local suppliers the sector supported another 1.7 million jobs. On top of this, the sector is estimated to support a further 1.3 million jobs through the wages it pays its employees, some or all of which are subsequently spent on consumer goods and services. Foreign tourists arriving by air to the United States, who spend their money in the local economy, are estimated to support an additional 1.3 million jobs. In total 6.5 million jobs are supported by air transport and tourists arriving by air.

...and spending

The air transport industry, including airlines, and its supply chain, are estimated to support US $641 billion of GDP in the United States. Spending by foreign tourists supports a further US $138 billion of the country’s GDP, totaling to US $779 billion. In total, 4.2 percent of the country’s GDP is supported by inputs to the air transport sector and foreign tourists arriving by air.

For forecasts of the industry’s GDP and jobs contribution over the next 20 years see page 4
The importance of air transport to the United States | 2

Air transport facilitates flows of goods, investment and people

US $211 bn FOREIGN TOURIST EXPENDITURE
US $7.8 trillion FDI
US $2.2 trillion EXPORTS

Note: Data relate to all modes of transport. Foreign direct investment (FDI) figure represents cumulative inward stock at the end of 2017
Source: UNWTO, UNCTAD and World Bank

The most important benefits from air transport go to passengers and shippers and the spillover impacts on their businesses. The value to passengers, shippers and the economy can be seen from the spending of foreign tourists and the value of exports (though note these figures include all modes of transport). A key economic flow, stimulated by good air transport connections, is foreign direct investment, creating productive assets that will generate a long-term flow of GDP.

Top five international tourist arrivals (all modes of transport) by country of residence
1. Canada
2. Mexico
3. United Kingdom
4. Japan
5. China

Top five busiest direct flights arrivals
1. Canada
2. Mexico
3. United Kingdom
4. Japan
5. Dominican Republic

Top five busiest air cargo routes
1. People’s Republic of China
2. United Kingdom
3. Japan
4. Republic of Korea
5. Germany

Source: UNWTO and IATA

Annual passenger flows by region (origin-destination, '000s)

North America is the largest market for passenger flows to and from the United States, followed by Europe and Latin America. 617 million passengers arrived to the United States from North America (87.4 percent of total), 33.7 million passengers arrived from Europe (4.8 percent of the total) and 26.1 million passengers arrived from Latin America (3.7 percent).

Source: IATA Direct Data Solutions
Air transport connects the United States to cities around the world

Air transport generates benefits to consumers and the wider economy by providing speedy connections between cities. These virtual bridges in the air enable the economic flows of goods, investments, people and ideas that are the fundamental drivers of economic growth.

Map of the United States’ air connectivity, by its largest markets (segment basis)  

IATA’s measure of how well a country is connected to economically important cities around the world is shown above. The map shows the United States’ connectivity at a regional level and how it has evolved. The United States’ connections to the Middle East have grown the fastest over the last five years.

Number of international city pairs direct service in the top ten countries by passenger numbers in the world

1. United States
2. People’s Republic of China
3. Japan
4. United Kingdom
5. India
6. Indonesia
7. Spain
8. Germany
9. Brazil
10. France

Source: IATA, Aviation Benefits Beyond Borders 2018 report

---

4 The air connectivity scores reported are total destination weighted seats per 1000 people. IATA developed the Air Connectivity Indicator calculated based on the total route capacity (in terms of seats available) weighted by the destination airport’s relative capacity (calculated as the ratio of seats available at that airport relative to the capacity at the airport with most available seats) divided by the population size of the country with a 0.15% of connectivity threshold in 2013.
Ease of travel, visa openness, and trade facilitation are vitally important

If air transport’s unique contribution is the bridges it creates between cities, then the flows of goods, people, investment and ideas that stimulate economic development must flow unimpeded to maximise their contribution to consumers and the wider economy. Here we measure how freely goods and people flow across borders.

**Passenger facilitation and visa openness**

The United States’ passenger facilitation (6.7/10) scores above the North American average (6.6/10). On the World Economic Forum’s Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index, the country ranks 122nd for visa openness. In all these scores, higher is better.

**Measures of air cargo trade facilitation**

The United States’ facilitation of air cargo through its customs and borders regulations ranks 15th out of 124 countries in terms of the Air Trade Facilitation Index (ATFI) and 10th out of 135 countries in terms of the eFreight Friendliness Index (EFFI) globally.

**Forecast scenarios for passenger traffic, jobs and GDP footprint**

Air transport market in the United States is forecast under the “current trends” scenario to grow by 62% in the next 20 years. This would result in an additional 531.6 million passenger journeys by 2037. If met, this increased demand would support approximately US $1.26 trillion of GDP and almost 8 million jobs.

1. Source: Aviation Benefits Beyond Borders 2018 report (all currency is in the United States dollars at 2016 prices).
2. Data relates to 2017 or most recent.
3. Arrivals of non-resident tourists at national borders or in all types of accommodation establishments, by country of residence.
4. Passenger facilitation, one of the Air Transport Regulatory Competitiveness Indicators developed by IATA in 2018, looks at the ease of people moving around the globe and how the governments facilitate this process. It assesses the performance of economies on implementation of open skies agreements, advance passenger information and automatic border control systems and visa requirements.
5. Entry visa requirements for a tourism visit from worldwide source markets (10 = no visa required for visitors from all source markets, 0 = traditional visa required for visitors from every source market). Source: WEF, Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2017.
6. The IATA Air Trade Facilitation Index (ATFI) measures the extent to which a country facilitates air cargo through its customs and borders processes and regulations. The IATA e-Freight Friendliness Index (EFFI) assesses the actual penetration of electronic transactions and documents in air cargo shipments (Value of Air Cargo 2016 report).
7. Passengers are counted as departures, including connections. The passenger forecasts are based on the IATA 20-year passenger forecast (October 2018). Data on GDP and jobs 2017 are from Oxford Economics. GDP and jobs forecasts are from IATA Economics.
8. All data relates to 2018 or most recent unless stated otherwise.