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Denver International Airport Sees Passenger Traffic Fall 51% in 2020 ***DEN recovery stronger than national average***

DENVER – Feb. 8, 2021 – After six-consecutive years of record-setting growth, total passenger traffic at Denver International Airport (DEN) dropped 51% in 2020 compared to 2019 as the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the aviation industry. DEN served 33.7 million passengers in 2020. The most recent year in history with similar traffic was 1997, two years after the airport opened, when 34.9 million passengers were recorded through DEN.

“2020 was a year like we’ve never seen before in the aviation industry,” said DEN CEO Kim Day. “After starting the spring with a precipitous 96% plunge in passenger traffic, DEN’s traffic has rebounded better than we predicted, and finished 2020 ahead of our projections. As we look to the future, DEN is positioned well financially and has a strong domestic network that will help us continue our recovery. In the meantime, we remain focused on the health and safety of our passengers and employees and we’re ready when you’re ready to travel.”

Pending finalization of 2020 passenger traffic numbers by other airports, DEN expects to finish the year as the third-busiest airport in the United States, behind ATL and DFW, and in the top 10 busiest airports in the world. In 2019, DEN was the fifth-busiest airport in the U.S. and 16th-busiest airport in the world.

DEN experienced its lowest passenger traffic volumes on April 15, 2020, when 2,026 people traveled through DEN Transportation Security Administration (TSA) checkpoints, compared to 56,386 on the same weekday the previous year. DEN’s traffic has rebounded better than predicted and is above the national average. Volume through TSA checkpoints was down 62% overall in the U.S. in 2020, while DEN finished the year down 54%.

Throughout the summer, DEN was often the number-one ranked airport in the U.S. for TSA throughput. Air travel began meaningful recovery in June and for the 31 weeks from June 1 through Dec. 28, DEN ranked as the #1 or #2 U.S. airport in TSA throughput for 22 of 31 weeks. DEN also ranked #1 or #2 for 20 weeks in a row (June 8 through Oct. 19). DEN’s performance speaks directly to the airport’s strong domestic demand profile since international travel was minimal through most of 2020.

As airlines added flights back throughout the summer and into the fall, Denver emerged as the top airport for year-over-year seat capacity retention. For each of the last five months of 2020 (August – December), Denver had the most seat capacity (seats on flights leaving daily) as compared to 2019 levels among the 20 busiest U.S. airports. This capacity served not only origination and destination travelers who used the TSA checkpoints, but also accommodated connecting passengers. With fewer nonstop options available due to low demand, DEN is experiencing an increase in connecting passengers as a percent of total passengers moving through the airport, and in 2020 connecting passengers accounted for 41% of the airport’s total passengers, up from 36% in 2019.

Although there were 75 days in 2020 when DEN did not have international service (between April 2 and June 15), international flights are slowly returning, and at the end of 2020, DEN offered nonstop service to 16 international destinations in six countries. This includes the addition of a new destination to the airport’s international air service network with the launch of new nonstop flights on United to San Jose, Costa Rica in December. For the year, DEN’s international passenger traffic declined by 70 percent as compared to 2019, and it was the first year since 2003 DEN handled fewer than one million international passengers.

All of Denver’s domestic carriers continued to operate at the airport throughout 2020. In May, Denver became the largest operation for Southwest. It is also significant to note that Denver was the largest station for three carriers – Frontier, Southwest and United – during Q4 2020. For the year, United maintained the position of Denver’s largest carrier, followed by Southwest and Frontier. In addition, DEN’s domestic network has remained robust during the pandemic, and at the end of 2020, DEN provided nonstop service to more than 160 domestic destinations in 43 states.

Throughout the year, airlines announced the addition of competitive service on 16 domestic routes, and four new domestic destinations were added to DEN's network:

- Cheyenne, Wyoming (United)
- Provo, Utah (Allegiant)
- Rochester, Minnesota (United)
- Sioux City, Iowa (United)

Additionally, two destinations that fall under the Essential Air Service (EAS) program gained nonstop flights to Denver in 2020: Clovis, N.M. (CVN) and Salina, Kan. (SLN).

Mail, freight and cargo operations were consistently the bright spot for 2020. The 667 million pounds of cargo transported during the year was only a slight decrease of 1.6% from 2019. Volume on all-cargo carriers increased by 8% for the year, while volume carried by passenger carriers declined by 29%.

[DEN passenger traffic reports are available here.](#)

Denver International Airport is the fifth-busiest airport in the United States. DEN is one of the busiest airline hubs in the world's largest aviation market. DEN is the primary economic engine for the state of Colorado, generating more than \$33 billion for the region annually. For more information visit www.FlyDenver.com, check us out on [YouTube](#) and [Instagram](#), like us on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#).

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