

Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport held a ribbon-cutting ceremony Monday for its new car rental center as the airport prepares for the impact of the American Airlines and US Airways merger. HEIDI HEILBRUNN/STAFF

MERGER COULD BRING MORE NONSTOP FLIGHTS TO GSP

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The merger of American Airlines and US Airways could have a positive impact on Greenville-Spartanburg International, creating opportunities for nonstop flights to Miami and other cities, the airport's CEO said Monday.

Both carriers fly to the airport but "there's no overlapping routes between American Airlines and US Airways out of GSP," Dave Edwards, also GSP's president, told GreenvilleOnline.com.

"We do think that there's going to be an evaluation by the merged carrier about what they do long term with their hubs," Edwards said.

Asked about GSP's route structure, Edwards said the airport needs nonstop flights to Miami, Boston, Denver, Las Vegas and Phoenix and more service to New York airports.

Miami flights would provide a gateway to the Caribbean and South America and that would open new international markets to GSP, Edwards said.

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> **DAVE EDWARDS,**
> GSP's CEO-president

CITIES WITHOUT GSP NONSTOP FLIGHTS

Miami, Boston, Denver, Las Vegas, Phoenix

"Those are some of keys for us as we move ahead," he said. "Some of that is business-related travel and some of that is leisure-related travel. We have some opportunities on both fronts."

The benefits of nonstop flights are numerous, especially for business travelers, said D.J. Rama, president of Greenville-based JHM Hotels, which owns and operates 42 national hotels with 7,500 rooms. The company is completing a multimillion dollar construction project on the Hyatt Regency Greenville on North Main Street.

"When you're connecting flights from every market that you're coming through, and with all the flight-pattern cancellations that happen, typically we don't enjoy that experience and you try to avoid those experiences," Rama said.

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"You do your best to have minimal airtime or airport time when you're traveling from Point A to Point B."

Nonstop flights also allow customers "to have an ease of travel to get to Greenville" and help the region compete as a meeting destination, Rama said.

Edwards said he expects US Airways' Charlotte hub to fare well after the airline combines with American.

But there could be some realignment, he said.

Citing the previous airline mergers of Delta-Northwest, United-Continental and Southwest-AirTran, Edwards said that "even though they've all initially come out and said there would be no reduction in frequency in those hubs, there always has been."

"We saw that with Cincinnati (a Delta hub) being pulled down and Memphis (a Northwest hub) being pulled down," Edwards said. "Historically, even back to the American Airlines-TWA days when American actually acquired TWA, they pulled down the St. Louis hub.

"So we think some of that hub realignment is going to occur. We think Charlotte sits pretty well at this point. It's a very cost-effective hub for US Airways, one of the lowest cost in the system if not the lowest cost airport in the system. We think that's good for us at GSP moving forward."

Edwards was interviewed following a ribbon-cutting ceremony for GSP's new $3.3 million rental car customer center. The center is part of the airport's $115 million terminal improvement program.

ENVILLE NEWS



With the new rental car center opening, Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport has completed the first project within Phase I of its improvement program HEIDI HEILBRUNN/STAFF

With the rental car center's opening, GSP has completed the first project within Phase I of Wingspan, a four-year terminal improvement program. The rental car agencies are now located on the first and second levels of parking garage A.

"With the completion of this project, passengers will start to see the effect Wingspan will have on the efficiency of the airport," Edwards said.

Three rental facilities are located on the first floor of parking garage A. Two others are housed on the second floor of the parking garage. Public restrooms have also been installed on the first floor.

Wingspan's next phase is already underway and will include the addition of food, beverage and retail outlets in the south end of the terminal, the addition of a third baggage carousel and construction of a covered walkway connecting the terminal to parking garage A.

That area also will feature an exterior glass front. Once Wingspan is complete, the front exterior of the terminal will be glass, allowing for the use natural lighting and reducing overall energy costs, airport officials said.

GSP officials launched Wingspan, a four-year terminal improvement program, in May 2012 to modernize the main terminal building, improve passenger flow and upgrade the facility.

Airport funds will cover 80 percent of the program, and the remaining 20 percent of funding will come from a combination of the Federal Aviation Administration's Airport Improvement Program Fund and the Transportation Security Administration, officials said. The terminal will remain open throughout the work.