BUSINESS

Southwest adds direct flights

Direct service to Denver, Las Vegas will link to West Coast destinations

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Getting to the West Coast easily has been a headache for Upstate business travelers for years.

But now the anticipated schedule of Southwest Airlines at Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport gives travelers flexibility they've rarely had.

Dave Edwards, GSP executive director, told commissioners Monday that he and Rosylin Weston, the airport's marketing/public relations coordinator, had negotiated with Southwest officials to include three direct, one-stop destinations from GSP — Denver, Las Vegas and Boston.

A direct, one-stop flight means the plane would stop once but passengers would not change planes, he said. The Denver flight would stop in Nashville while the Las Vegas flight would stop at Chicago Midway and the Boston flight at Baltimore-Washington International.

All three of those one-stop cities are important to Upstate business and leisure travelers, said Joe Erwin, president of Erwin Penland ad agency and a supporter of recruiting Southwest to the Upstate.

Also, all three are among the top 25 destinations of GSP passengers, said Rosylin Weston.

"I think it's a big deal," Erwin said. "There are a lot of people for whom Boston is an important destination."

"Boston is very important to Michelin," he said, adding the company has operations in Nova Scotia, Canada. His firm also sends employees to Boston often, and "it's tough to get there."

The western cities of Denver and Las Vegas are likely to attract both business and leisure travelers, he said. And in addition to being draws in their own right, flights leave both often for the West Coast. And Southwest's routing system allows them to land and depart an airport quickly, often in only 20 minutes.

Mike Thomson, senior vice president with Synnex Corp., with its sales arm in Greenville, has said for years that his company needs better air access to the West Coast. Synnex headquarters are in Fremont, Calif.

"People are going to find it enormously convenient compared to other options we had — and the cost is great," Erwin said. "Southwest can really be transformative in our ability to recruit industry" that needs convenient and affordable travel to Boston, the West and the West Coast.

Last month, Southwest announced seven daily nonstop flights — three to BWI, two to Midway, one to Nashville, one to Houston and one to Orlando.

Also, Edwards reported that the low bid of $712,000 by Greenville-based SYS Construction has been accepted for the renovation of the counter and office space that will be used by Southwest. The commission earlier approved spending up to $1.1 million for the renovation.