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# Southwest may link five cities to Upstate

## Baltimore, Boston, Nashville, Denver, Las Vegas considered

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Southwest Airlines is considering service from Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport to at least five cities not served by the airport now — Boston, Nashville, Denver, Las Vegas and Baltimore — GSP's top executive said Wednesday.

Southwest also is thinking about launching service to at least three other cities already served by other airlines from GSP — Chicago, Houston and Tampa — but it might fly to other airports, said Dave Edwards, GSP's executive director.

Edwards said he recommended those destinations to the airline, and it's considering them, but, "we don't know what Southwest is going to choose."

Southwest spokeswoman Laurel Moffat said the Dallas-based airline still is studying which cities to serve from GSP and plans to announce its picks in the fall and begin flying next spring. It announced service at Greenville/Spartanburg and Charleston in May, but it didn't give details on destinations, fares or start dates.

Edwards said he expects Southwest to start at GSP with six to eight daily flights to four destinations, though he can't say for sure. If Upstate flyers support the airline, Edwards said, the number of destinations could double in two to three years.

"The proof will be in the pudding," he said. "The community can be the only one that can come out and make it successful."

Edwards said Southwest is thinking about providing service from GSP to one city in Florida, maybe Tampa or Orlando, but GSP is urging it to pick Tampa because Allegiant Air already provides good service to Orlando.

The arrival of Southwest and its competitive prices is expected to drive down fares at GSP and make Greenville more attractive for corporate headquarters.

See CITIES on page 3A

## CITIES

FROM PAGE 1A

Edwards said he expects average fares at GSP to drop by $100 per roundtrip ticket, from $377 to $277, the average in similar markets served by Southwest.

"We do believe we'll see an extraordinary reduction in airfare," Edwards told board members of the Greenville Area Development Corp., Greenville County's economic development organization.

Greenville accounting executive Hunter Howard, a member of the GADC board and a former president of the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce, said he thinks Southwest's arrival will help Upstate businesses cut travel costs and make the region more attractive to corporate headquarters.

"I think it's going to be a real shot in the arm for the business/economic picture in the Upstate," he said.

But Mike Putman, president of Putman Travel in Greenville, said he doesn't expect Southwest to keep fares down at GSP over the long term.

"They've inched their rates up there where there is pretty much price parity with the other legacy carriers in the marketplace," Putman said. "They're not the low-cost carrier that everybody perceives them as."

Moffat, the Southwest spokeswoman, said while the airline may not always offer the lowest fares, it provides great service.

He said the airline transports luggage for free, a potential savings of $120 per customer.

"That allows us to stand out in the industry," she said.