

DSM Airport surpasses 2 million passengers in one year for first time

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The so-called "Southwest effect" has apparently taken flight in Des Moines.

For the first time in its history, [Des Moines International Airport](#) surpassed 2 million passengers in 2012, airport officials said Friday and they are crediting, at least in part, the arrival of Southwest Airlines.

"What we are seeing is the effect of competition in the Des Moines market that came with the introduction of Southwest and other carriers competing with them," said Don Smithey, the airport's executive director. "It's having a profound effect on the airport."

Experts say that competition has had a ripple effect on regional airports, as well.

Airport industry analyst [Sheri Ernico](#) of California-based [LeighFisher](#), said two major factors, including the state's relatively healthy economy and the recapturing of passengers from other regional airports like Kansas City and Omaha, likely combined to make 2012 historic year for Des Moines.

Omaha's Eppley Airfield reported a 4.1 percent dip in year-over-year traffic in November. Kansas City International Airport's traffic dipped 8.55 percent that same month.

Meanwhile, Iowa's largest commercial airport had its best month of the year when year-over-year traffic increased 14.1 percent in November, the most recent month with statistics available from all three airports.

"This is huge for Des Moines," Ernico said. "When you think about what is happening around the country, they are outperforming the rest of the country."

Available seats in Des Moines increased steadily throughout 2012, as airlines reduced the number of smaller jets at the airport and replaced them with higher-capacity aircraft. Seat capacity is an industry measurement that reflects confidence in a market.

The airport nearly eclipsed the 2 million passenger mark in 2004, falling just 10,000 passengers shy of the mark. The economic downturn killed any momentum, however, and the numbers dropped. By the time Don Smithey came onboard as executive director after

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being lured out of retirement in 2010, the airport was down to roughly 1.7 million passengers per year.

Iowa Department of Transportation's Tim McClung said the rebound began after his department conducted a study that showed Des Moines was losing a large part of its passengers to Kansas City and Omaha.

"Hats off to them, they have done a great job," said McClung, the planning and outreach manager for IDOT's office of aviation. "It's a great milestone to reach."

Tags: Des Moines International Airport, don smithey, Iowa Department of Transportation


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I have a hard time believing that Des Moines is really outperforming the rest of the airports around the country to that extent...I think it has a lot to do with the fact that for the first time in forever, the other airlines that operate out of Des Moines aren't in a market where they can afford to gouge the passenger, because of the new discount heavyweight that has moved in. In other words, the Southwest Effect.

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