

## Airport posts increases in flights, seats and passengers in 2018

By [Wayne Risher \(/authors/58\)](#)

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**Memphis International Airport posted gains in passengers, flights and available seats on planes in 2018 for the first time since Delta Air Lines dehubbed the airport.** (Jim Weber/Daily Memphian file)

Memphis International Airport's passenger operation grew in every key metric in 2018 for the first time since Delta Air Lines withdrew hub status, airport chief Scott Brockman said Thursday.

The airport posted increases in passengers served, 5.4 percent, seats on planes, 3.4 percent, and flights, 3.2 percent, Brockman said during his annual state of the airport update to the Memphis-Shelby County Airport Authority board.

The board also approved a \$965,000 contract with Allen & Hoshall to design a reconstruction project on 4,125 linear feet of taxiway Alpha west and approved another lease amendment for prime tenant FedEx. FedEx is embarking this year on a more than \$1 billion transformation of its FedEx Express world hub at the airport.

The airport closed out 2018 with 85 flights a day in December and expected to be on pace to record its largest number ever of passengers who are flying in and out of Memphis and not just catching a connecting flight.

Brockman touted gains including Frontier to Philadelphia and San Antonio; Southwest adding a Denver nonstop and tripling Dallas service; United adding a fourth weekday flight to Newark; and Allegiant offering seasonal nonstop service to Oakland, California.

He said the airport will continue its focus on new nonstop destinations in 2019, although it won't be easy.

"We're in that zone where those air service wins are much more difficult to come by," said Brockman, the authority's president and chief executive officer.

"We're working very hard for each one of these, and it takes a lot of constant energy," Brockman said. "Now we're in what I would call the persistency mode. It takes persistent contact, persistent effort to move some of these things forward for new service."

The major markets where there is no nonstop service are led by Boston, San Francisco, San Diego, Seattle and Raleigh.

Prospects for a Boston nonstop got a boost last year when Boston-based agricultural

The number of flights declined sharply in 2014, when the downsizing of Delta's connecting hub hit full stride, but the airport continued to lose flights each year after that, until the trend reversed in 2018, Brockman said.

The loss of flights was accompanied, however, by another trend.

Airlines brought in larger aircraft to serve the remaining routes in Memphis, which had the impact of increasing both the number of seats available and the number of passengers each year after 2014.

Airport data showed the average flight at Memphis in 2013 carried 78.1 passengers, compared to 104 in 2018.

Chief financial officer Forrest Artz said the number of December flights fell from 91 daily flights in November, because of seasonal reductions by Frontier and Southwest and reduced frequencies by American (to Charlotte) and Delta (to Atlanta).

Total cargo handled was up 3 percent from a year earlier between July 1 and Dec. 31.

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