

February 28, 2002

AirTran Airways to begin service in Wichita May 8

The Fair Fares campaign to bring low-cost air service to Wichita Mid-Continent Airport scored a major victory Thursday when AirTran Airways announced it would begin service to Atlanta and Chicago.

At a news conference in City Hall, Mayor Bob Knight announced that AirTran, the nation's second largest low-fare carrier, will begin service May 8. AirTran will launch three daily nonstop flights between Wichita and Atlanta, and two daily nonstop flights between Wichita and Chicago (Midway). Tickets sales begin immediately.

All AirTran flights to and from Wichita will use Boeing 717 aircraft. The short-haul jets have 117 seats; 105 in coach and 12 in business class.

"Wichita, your low-fare airline has arrived," Knight told a crowd of close to 150 Fair Fare supporters, city officials and members of the media. "I promised that we are going to change the way Wichita business travels ... and we have."

Kevin Healy, AirTran Airways' vice president of planning, says the airline is confident of its success in the Wichita market. He also pointed out some differences in his company's service from other discount carriers, including assigned seating, which market leader Southwest Airlines does not have. Like Southwest, however, AirTran does not require a roundtrip purchase or Saturday night stays for discounted fares.

Ironically, Healy said the current state of air service to Wichita forced him to fly into the Kansas City airport and then drive to Wichita to attend today's meeting.

"I'm sure many of you will miss that 3 1/2-hour drive," Healy said sarcastically. Immediately following the announcement Knight convened a special city council meeting to accept a contract between the city and AirTran. City Finance Director Ray Trail, who offered the two-year contract for consideration, said it includes the pledges raised during the Fair Fare campaign, which now total \$4.7 million, and a commitment by the city to spend \$600,000 to help AirTran's marketing efforts. The contract also includes a revenue guarantee by the city to underwrite any monthly losses by AirTran during its first two years of operation in Wichita. The guarantee is capped at \$3 million during AirTran's first year of service, and \$1.5 million its second year.

The contract was approved by a 7-0 vote.

Knight says the AirTran fares will save more than \$42 million for business and leisure travelers throughout south central Kansas.

"There will be hundreds of thousands of people who will be clearly grateful for what you've done" in bringing the low-cost carrier to Wichita, Knight says. "The challenge now is to use it. We need to get the word out throughout south central Kansas: Use this airline."

Knight also cited the efforts of many individuals and groups who he said helped make the Fair Fares campaign successful, including the Air Service Task Force, the Fair Fares Committee, the Business Investment Group (BIG) and City Manager Chris Cherches.

"Being able to initiate two routes was better than we had anticipated," Knight says. "Now, we're committed to pursue options for flights going west, too."

"We still need to get a western route," says Fair Fares campaign manager David Ulrich, who said the campaign will continue to raise pledges and travel commitments. "We've set a celebration for March 6, and will talk about how to bring Frontier Airlines to Wichita Mid-Continent Airport."

To mark the new service to Wichita, AirTran will offer special introductory fares as of \$79 one-way between Wichita and Atlanta and \$59 one-way between Wichita and Chicago. The introductory fare tickets require a seven-day advance purchase, and must be purchased by March 12. Travel must be completed by Sept. 30. Some blackout dates and restrictions apply.

AirTran offers 346 flights a day to 36 cities throughout the eastern United States. The airline's hub is at Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport.

For more information about AirTran, visit <http://www.airtran.com>.