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Pandemic Impacts Cut MSP Passengers to 14.9 Million in 2020 Health Safety Measures Support Start to Travel Recovery

MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL – Total passenger traffic at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport (MSP) fell to 14.9 million in 2020, 62 percent less than in 2019, based on year-end data released by the Metropolitan Airports Commission, which operates MSP. The severe drop in passengers echoes similar significant losses suffered by other U.S. airports and airlines due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to take a toll on global air travel.

Prior to the pandemic, MSP had ten consecutive years of total passenger growth, reaching a record 39 million passengers in 2019. MSP was trending to surpass 2019 levels into early March of last year, when the pandemic forced a dramatic global decline in passenger demand and flights. MSP passenger levels dropped more than 95 percent under pre-pandemic levels by late April.

MSP supported 244,911 aircraft operations (takeoffs and landings) in 2020 versus 406,076 in 2019, a decline of about 40 percent. Aircraft load factors – the percentage of occupied seats -- dropped to as low as 10 percent during the pandemic and haven't recovered beyond 60 percent, on average, as some airlines continue to block seats to support in-flight social distancing measures.

“We experienced the largest drop in air travel demand in aviation history in 2020. It will take years to recover,” said Brian Ryks, CEO of the MAC. “December 2020 brought some of the busiest travel days since the pandemic began, but still far below normal. We hope to see a significant increase in demand in the latter half of 2021, particularly in leisure travel, as the COVID-19 vaccination program moves forward. It will likely take longer to see meaningful recovery in the business and international travel sectors.”

December passenger levels spiked around Christmas with a pandemic record of nearly 22,000 passengers clearing MSP checkpoints on December 27. However, the total number of passengers for the month, 1,079,757, was still down 66 percent compared to the 3,221,082 passengers in December 2019.

The slow recovery of passenger travel and operations that began in late spring 2020 was supported by industry-wide adoption of safety initiatives. MSP implemented rigorous cleaning protocols as soon as the first impacts from the pandemic were felt. Those protocols are part of a comprehensive health safety program, [Travel Confidently MSP](#), that continues to evolve based on the latest best practices and guidance from industry and health experts.

The key elements of the Travel Confidently MSP program include face mask requirements, promotion of social distancing, installation of hundreds of hand sanitizing dispensers, development of hundreds of Plexiglass barriers at all major customer interaction points, and pre-booked parking that allows for a touchless transactions when reserving and paying for parking spots and entering or exiting MPS facilities. Most recently, MSP earned [GBAC STAR™ Facility accreditation](#) and the [Airport Health Accreditation](#), both requiring the highest standards in facility cleanliness, safety and operational measures.

Other 2020 highlights include an increase in the portion of travelers beginning their trip at MSP. Originating passengers accounted for 65 percent of all travelers, compared to 63 percent in 2019. About 35 percent of travelers used MSP to connect between flights, compared to 37 percent in 2019.

The top five airlines in passenger market share in 2020 were:

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|----------------|-------|
| 1. Delta* | 68.8% |
| 2. Sun Country | 10.6% |
| 3. American* | 6.3% |
| 4. Southwest | 4.6% |
| 5. United* | 4.0% |

*includes regional affiliates.

MSP has seen a moderate recovery of routes since March 2020. In the final week of January 2021, there are 155 active routes (134 domestic and 21 international). The number of suspended routes is 61 (43 domestic and 18 international). Airlines are operating a schedule of 299 average daily departures vs. 469 in January 2020. February's schedule is anticipated to increase to 304 average daily departures vs. 471 in February 2020.

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The Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) owns and operates one of the nation's largest airport systems, including Minneapolis-St Paul International (MSP) and six general aviation airports. The MAC's airports connect the region to the world and showcase Minnesota's extraordinary culture to millions of passengers from around the globe who arrive or depart through MAC airports each year. Though a public corporation of the state of Minnesota, the organization is not funded by income or property taxes. Instead, the MAC's operations are funded by rents and fees generated by users of its airports. For more information, visit www.metroairports.org.