

Statement

Metropolitan Knoxville Airport Authority

Metropolitan Knoxville Airport Authority President William F. Marrison Response to AirTran Airways Announcement

Knoxville, TN – AirTran Airways, a subsidiary of Southwest Airlines, notified me that the airline will be ceasing operations at McGhee Tyson Airport on June 3, 2012. Passengers holding reservations or passengers desiring to make reservations for flights to or from Knoxville have no need to alter their travel plans prior to June 3, 2012.

This comes as a disappointment to the airport and the community that has successfully supported the nonstop AirTran Airways flights to Orlando from Knoxville. We have been informed that their decision to leave our airport is based upon the realities of the current economic climate and sustained high fuel prices.

We have been concerned that it would be a challenge to keep AirTran Airways in our market following their acquisition by Southwest Airlines because of the uncertainties involved with the merger of two airlines. We responded with an aggressive air service campaign including tourism studies, site visits and community partnerships with corporations and organizations like East Tennesseans for Airfare Competition (ETAC) that would guarantee their success. It seems that the issues that are out of our control outweighed the benefits within our control.

Low fare service continues to be available to numerous popular destinations from McGhee Tyson Airport. Frontier Airlines provides low fare flights to the west through their Denver hub while Allegiant Air offers low fares to multiple cities in Florida including Orlando. Allegiant Air will also begin low fare nonstop service to Las Vegas on November 18, 2011.

We will not let today's announcement deter our efforts to bring additional low fares to McGhee Tyson Airport. We have a good story to tell and we will continue to work closely with all airlines, including Southwest, to bring East Tennesseans affordable air service.

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