

# Departures

Opinions On Current Issues In Aviation

## Air Travel And Private Aviation Are Not The Enemy

By Robert Mann

Air travel is the American Way. Our air travel market is the world's largest and our extent and use of scheduled and private aviation far exceed the rest of the world combined. Scheduled and private aviation have for decades been major contributors to American business productivity.

America is a vast, diverse country where private aviation is vital and an essential infrastructure — and not only where scheduled commercial air service links are sparse and circuitous. Private aviation contributes to greater business efficiency, faster communication and improved readiness in times of peace and conflict.

Private aviation and support industries are technological innovators and major job-creating enterprises. The growth of private aviation has created hundreds of thousands of highly skilled domestic research, design, manufacturing and support positions. The productivity that private aviation throws off creates further consumer demand and skilled jobs through a strong multiplier effect.

Over the past two business cycles, private aviation assumed an even more critical role as the scheduled airline industry has entered slow liquidation. Airlines once created and sold productivity. With few exceptions, that is no longer the case. Year after year, scheduled airlines underperform ever more modest customer expectations. By design, the “least common denominator” network airline business model fails all but the least demanding hub city-based customers with undesirable connections and trip circuitry, pervasive delays on top of excessive elapsed times, intrusive processes requiring long airport dwell time, devolution toward “self-service”, unbundling, and fees upon fees.

Private aviation is the necessary, evolutionary successor to scheduled air service. Pure productivity by design, on-demand service — when, where and how. [It is] the winning value proposition for business and high time value individuals, which explains the meteoric rise in number of aircraft and their utilization — the mode of choice for premium fare-paying passengers who have opted out of scheduled service. Private aviation has never been more vital and necessary, and the

market clearly recognizes this, as evidenced by the largest, most capable and most heavily utilized private fleet in history; many of them long-haul, large cabin jets.

Private aviation's present “optics” problem is not indicative of its usefulness and efficiency or its continuing demand by businesses. Indeed, private aviation's role will only grow faster with the deteriorating trend in frequency, capacity and utility of the scheduled air transportation system.

Private aviation is not immune to the business cycle. We now see a typical if highly exaggerated business cycle phenomenon with a bit of clawback at perceptions of wretched excess thrown in as a statement of righteous indignation. Typical of the nadir, we see forward-looking firms investing in performance and productivity, communications and mobility processes. So too with private aviation: faster, higher, bigger, better.

“Optics” will soon give way to reason. As the economy recovers, as the financial firms pay down their TARP's, and as the media focus changes from outrage to optimism again, all this will change for the better, and the pent-up demand for air travel will surprise on the upside.

As the market rights itself, we must not permit policymakers to fail to address the nation's aviation infrastructure needs. Promoting aviation industry self-help and investing in future air traffic management systems must be part of that plan. The physics problem that is aviation requires we coordinate transportation (air and surface modes), energy, environmental and economic policy.

Without well coordinated policy in ALL those areas, we risk compromising the viability and effectiveness of our scheduled and private air travel networks, and we place at risk industries that have been vital to prior rounds of American business expansion and will be critical to advancing the incipient recovery.

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