

# American Air Transport Grid Is Disappearing

by Anita Gallagher

“We are losing our rail system, the last vestige of it. We are also in the process of crippling, and virtually destroying, our air-traffic system. If this were to occur . . . then the United States ceases to be an integrated nation. . . . It is no longer a unified, efficient national economy.”

In the Aug. 24, 2002 webcast in which he made that warning, Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche called for a national mandate in the November 2002 elections, for an “Emergency November Program,” to rebuild and reregulate the rail and air transportation systems.

The American people having failed to act, the problem is back on the agenda of President Bush and the 108th Congress with renewed force. Tables of air-traffic activity, and reductions of long-distance train routes, show the destruction LaRouche spoke of. All the legislation relating to air, rail, and highways is up for Congressional review this year.

The bankruptcy proceedings of United Airlines, the second-largest airline in the nation, and U.S. Airways, the seventh-largest, are showing the way to the nullification of the collective bargaining agreements of all air transport unions. On Jan. 8, four of United’s six unions will vote on union-recommended giveback packages ranging from 9-29%. If they approve, a 13% pay cut will be imposed on the International Association of Machinists (IAM) employees. On Dec. 27, United filed an 1113(e) motion, demanding immediate interim wage reductions from all unions to meet the “monthly milestone” cost-reduction targets set by the four banks that are its Debtors-in-Possession. United’s brief stated that if the targets were not met, United would be liquidated.

Signalling that these cuts will solve nothing, United issued a press release on Dec. 30 announcing that “significant” layoffs soon were likely. The same vise is being used on U.S. Airways, whose Debtor-in-Possession, Retirement Systems of Alabama—which itself lost money on its own stock and bond investments last year—threatened to liquidate U.S. Airways unless it agreed to \$200 million more in givebacks. U.S. Airways’ IAM negotiators recommended acceptance, and the mechanics will vote on Jan. 10.

## The Collapse Is On

But, beneath the news of day-to-day threats and layoffs, the passenger air grid is now collapsing, from the 31 “large hub” airports which handle 75% of all enplanements in the United States, to a “small hub” like Harlingen, Texas, which

TABLE 1

### Shrinkage at Some Large Hub Airports, 2001-2002

Airport	Flights Lost		Available Seats Lost	
	Weekly	%Weekly	Weekly	%Weekly
Boston Logan	-943	-23%	-77,814	-21%
Los Angeles	-1,239	-20%	-153,064	-21%
Newark	-740	-20%	-81,692	-20%
Washington Dulles	-606	-20%	-42,965	-18%
Miami	-322	-19%	-22,155	-11%
San Francisco	-592	-18%	-103,011	-23%
Orlando	-424	-16%	-42,007	-13%
St. Louis	-635	-14%	-96,734	-20%
Pittsburgh	-573	-14%	-63,442	-19%
Seattle-Tacoma	-450	-13%	-26,142	-7%
Baltimore-Washington	-329	-13%	-22,246	-8%
Tampa	-239	-12%	-17,882	-8%
Washington Reagan	-316	-12%	-57,996	-21%
New York JFK	-210	-12%	-26,169	-12%
New York LaGuardia	-431	-12%	-68,176	-17%
Ft. Lauderdale	-142	-10%	-10,689	-6%

Source: "Missed Connections: Finding Solutions to the Crisis in Air Travel," by Reconnecting America.

A large hub airport is one that handles 1% or more of total air passenger enplanements. The United States currently has 31 airports designated as large hubs.

handles 138 flights per week (see **Tables 1 and 2**). In an exhaustive study of 500 airports released on Dec. 18, a coalition called Reconnecting America has analyzed how many flights have been eliminated every week, comparing Fall 2001 to Fall 2002.

Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington Dulles and Newark—all large hubs, handling 1% or more of all the nation's scheduled commercial flights—lost 20% or more of their flights in the past year. The small and medium hub airports, handling 0.05-0.24% and 0.25-0.99% of all national flights, respectively, have been hit even harder. Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; Eugene, Oregon; West Palm Beach, Florida; Bangor, Maine; Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina; and Hilo, Hawaii, have lost more than 25% of their flights in the same period.

Many cities have lost their direct connections with the top ten airport hubs in the United States:

- Boston has eliminated five direct flights, including those to Austin, Texas and Elmira, New York.
- Newark no longer offers direct flights to Houston or Oakland, among other cities.
- Washington Dulles has axed its direct flights to Austin, Mobile, Sacramento, and Akron, and also eliminated important regional service to Lynchburg, Staunton, and Newport News, Virginia, and to Beckley and Bluefield, West Virginia.
- Los Angeles has cut flights to Anchorage, Hartford,

TABLE 2

### Small and Medium Hub Airports Hit Hardest, 2001-2002

Airport	Flights Lost		Available Seats Lost	
	Weekly	%Weekly	Weekly	%Weekly
Myrtle Beach AFB	-93	-35.9%	-7,026	-30%
Eugene, Ore.	-77	-31.3%	-4,210	-31%
West Palm Beach	-178	-30.07%	-17,849	-23.88%
Bangor, Me.	-64	-29.2%	-2,114	-23%
Raleigh-Durham	-545	-28.78%	-39,636	-25.37%
Hilo, Hi.	-50	-26.5%	-5,932	-26%
Mobile, Ala.	-48	-25.9%	-3,624	-26%
Palm Springs, Calif.	-74	-24.6%	-2,401	-16%
Rochester, N.Y.	-165	-24.4%	-11,773	-23%
Long Island				
MacArthur	-100	-23.2%	-3,248	-10%
Kansas City	-427	-21.65%	-44,993	-20.81%
Syracuse	-125	-21.2%	-7,769	-19%
Shreveport, La.	-58	-19.9%	-2,689	-20%
Buffalo	-155	-19.04%	-14,011	-19.18%
Harlingen, Tex.	-25	-18.4%	-1,098	-8%

Source: "Missed Connections: Finding Solutions to the Crisis in Air Travel," by Reconnecting America.

A small hub airport has between 0.05 and 0.24% of all U.S. enplanements; a medium hub has between 0.25 and 0.99%.

Dallas, Tulsa, Omaha, and to Merced, Santa Rosa, and Visalia in California.

- Pittsburgh has eliminated flights to Chattanooga, Cedar Rapids, Saginaw, Chicago Midway, Myrtle Beach, Omaha, Newburgh, New York, and Youngstown, Ohio.

In all, 55 destinations are no longer served by the ten largest hubs. The small and medium hub airports have also cut direct flights, degrading regional grids; e.g., from Raleigh-Durham, one can no longer fly direct to New Bern or Wilmington, North Carolina, or to Columbia or Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. Also, important access to national centers has been cut; Raleigh-Durham no longer offers direct flights to Denver, for example.

The "Reconnecting America" report has also ranked the ten non-hub airports in small markets that have been hit hardest by the reduction in the number of weekly flights. Worcester, Massachusetts lost 66% of its weekly flights, including those offering direct access to New York's JFK Airport, O'Hare in Chicago, and Orlando. Shenandoah Valley Regional Airport in Virginia lost 65% of its flights; Sierra Vista, Arizona lost 63%; Santa Fe lost 62%, including its service to Albuquerque; and so on.

Without the revenue from these lost flights, and with higher security costs, such airports face bankruptcy. Indeed, 21 non-hub airports had lost *all* their scheduled air service as of December 2001—including Youngstown, Ohio; Oneida, New York; and Gary, Indiana.