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NEWS RELEASE

Durango-La Plata County Airport: Commercial Passenger Service ... and So Much More

Durango, CO: The Durango-La Plata County Airport (DRO) is Colorado's fifth busiest commercial passenger airport, but the facility also serves a host of other critical purposes, which are often out of the public's view.

While commercial passenger service accounts for more than 90% of DRO's annual revenues, it accounts for less than half of its take-off and landing operations. General aviation – which refers to traffic by private planes owned by corporations and individuals – military, cargo and the ever-important U.S. Forest Service air tanker base actually make up the majority of DRO's flight operations.

"When you look at the entirety of DRO's operations, you see that it is a full community resource," said Tony Vicari, DRO's director of aviation. "Commercial passenger service pays the bills because the airlines and their passengers use the vast majority of our resources, but the community reaps benefits from the airport in so many other areas."

Activities related to commercial passenger service – airport parking, rental car concession and lease fees, airline terminal rent, airline landing fees, auto fuel sales for rental cars, and terminal concession and rental fees – comprise more than 91% of DRO's annual revenue¹. General aviation generates approximately 4% of annual revenue. Cargo – which includes overnight package delivery services such as FedEx and UPS – and air medical transport, each contribute less than 1% of annual airport revenues, despite their importance to the community.

The U.S. military is exempt from airport fees and U.S. Forest Service air tankers continue to operate at DRO as needed under a \$1 per year lease originally executed in the 1960s. The Forest Service purchases fuel at DRO, which does contribute to airport revenues.

¹ Based on 2017 full year revenue.

But airport take-off and landing operations tell a very different story. Commercial passenger service accounts for approximately 11,100 take-off and landing operations, and growing, each year. General aviation comprises the bulk of activity with more than 18,000 take-offs and landings annually. The military accounts for roughly 500 annual operations, mostly for training and refueling. Forest Service operations vary by year, based on regional wildfire activity.

“Depending on the year and the time of year, the U.S. Forest Service can be a large contributor to activity at DRO,” said Vicari. “Clearly, 2018 was a very busy year for the Forest Service, which fought not just the 416 fire but several other wildfires throughout the region.”

From June through September, the Forest Service conducted about 1,300 airplane take-offs and landing operations at DRO – not including related helicopter traffic – about half of which were in support of fighting the 416 fire. Forest Service personnel at DRO also provided support for aircraft refueling, refilling tankers with fire retardant, smokejumper/firefighter deployment and air attack operations, which supervise the process of attacking the wildfire from the air.

By contrast, the Forest Service conducted just 300 operations in 2017, which was a less active wildfire fire year in SW Colorado.

Local residents also depend on DRO for their overnight or priority deliveries by companies such as FedEx and UPS, which generally conduct operations in the early morning hours. Air medical transport – flying accident victims to a hospital, moving immobile patients to a better facility or transporting organ donations – serves a critical role, particularly in such an outdoor-focused community recognized for higher risk sports.

“Some of the operations at DRO are literally life-saving,” said Vicari. “But we also serve an important economic development function, contributing close to \$300 million to the regional economy each year. We’re proud of what we do here but we always try to maintain a service-first mind-set – we’re here for and because of our community.”

About Durango-La Plata County Airport

Durango-La Plata County Airport (DRO) is the primary regional airport for southwest Colorado and the Four Corners Region. As Colorado’s 5th busiest commercial airport, DRO saw over 372,000 passengers in 2017 and contributes \$280 million annually to the regional economy. DRO is served by two of the four largest U.S. airlines (American and United), offering nonstop routes to Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW), Denver (DEN), Phoenix (PHX) and seasonally Los Angeles (LAX). For more information, please visit www.flydurango.com. Follow us on twitter.com/DROAirport and facebook.com/DROAirport.

DRO operates as an enterprise fund of the City of Durango, and generates self-sustaining revenue from airport tenants and users in the form of airline rent and landing fees, terminal concessions, ground leases and parking fees. The airport does not receive any local tax funding.