

YOUR OPINIONS

Nonstop flight to D.C. from Lansing good for region



GORDON MACKAY GUEST WRITER

Indian Trails and Michigan Flyer support the efforts of Capital Region International Airport (LAN) to continue nonstop daily air service between Lansing and Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.

We encourage the residents and businesses of Greater Lansing to join us in writing to the U.S. Department of Transportation and Federal Aviation Administration in support of American Airlines' application to operate service to and from Washington, D.C., starting in November. It's easy to email them through LAN's website at www.FlyLansing.com.

Continuing Washington, D.C., air service is vital to mid-Michigan because transportation is one of the most important drivers of regional economic activity. That's why Ingham County taxpayers contribute \$5 million a year to support the airport. More mobility — in the form of more travel options — means more opportunities for commerce and growth.

It's all about connectivity. We know this from experience. Indian Trails — a 105-year-old family business — is Michigan's first and largest privately owned bus transportation operator, carrying 1 million passengers more than 4.3 million miles annually. Our 33 daily, scheduled inter-city routes extend throughout the Upper and Lower Peninsulas, and into Chicago, Duluth, Minn., and Milwaukee, Wis. Together with MDOT, Greyhound, and Amtrak, we connect people with one another, as well as with places for shopping, dining, business, health care, education, worship, and recreation — and with the national transportation network.

The result of such mobility by the motorcoach industry in Michigan is

\$3.8 billion in impact on the state's economy per year, according to the American Bus Association Foundation.

Similarly, our affiliate Michigan Flyer — whose motorcoaches make 12 round trips a day between East Lansing, Ann Arbor and Detroit Metro Airport (DTW) — connects two great university towns with one another and with the world. Michigan Flyer's 58,000 out-of-state visitors a year collectively spend \$83 million in Michigan, and have a total impact of \$151 million on the state's economy.

Again, it's about connectivity — and the benefit to mid-Michigan is far greater when multiple modes of transportation coordinate rather than operate in isolation. To cite a few examples, most Amtrak passengers heading from East Lansing to Chicago start out on an Indian Trails bus, which connects them with their train in Kalamazoo. Also, about two-thirds of Michigan Flyer's passengers need airline flights in order to reach their destinations. And our region's ability to attract major conventions would be minimal without reliable motorcoach connections with the airlines.

American Airlines' proposed service at LAN would provide daily connections with our nation's capital, and from there to dozens of other cities in the eastern U.S. Starting next year, the airline would also offer daily flights to Chicago. Like our fleet of buses, the airline's planes go both ways. They, too, would bring in thousands of people from out of state to visit friends, family or our great universities, attend conventions, and do millions of dollars in business here.

Please take a few minutes today to let USDOT and FAA know that the proposed American Airlines service at LAN is essential to the mid-Michigan community.

Gordon Mackay is president of Indian Trails, Inc., and Michigan Flyer, LLC.