

**Jonathan Schechter – “Corpus Callosum” Column
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Two weeks ago, the News&Guide published a story about the Jackson Hole Airport Board’s annual trip to the American Association of Aviation Executives’ Legislative Issues Conference. The story included interviews with officials from other airports, which got me wondering how busy Jackson Hole is in comparison to other airports. Today’s column is an effort to answer that question.

Annually, the Federal Aviation Administration tallies the number of enplanements at every commercial airport in the country. By this metric, in 2011 the Jackson Hole Airport’s 279,065 enplanements ranked it as the 159th-busiest of the nation’s 387 commercial airports; i.e. in the 41st percentile.

To put that number in context, Table 1 looks at the nation’s 10 busiest airports in 2011. Atlanta’s Hartsfield-Jackson International was the busiest, with roughly 170 times more enplanements than the Jackson Hole Airport. Houston’s George H.W. Bush Intercontinental Airport, the nation’s 10th-busiest, had roughly 70 times more. Point: Whatever else it may be, the Jackson Hole Airport is not a member of the airport one percent.

So if we’re small fry, to whom should we compare ourselves? Table 2 shows the ten airports whose 2011 enplanement counts were closest to ours.

What’s interesting is that, while all of the other 10 “non-hub” airports enplaned within 8 percent as many passengers as Jackson Hole, all of them drew from far greater population bases. What’s especially noteworthy is that, among the 11 cities involved, only Jackson is classified by the US Office of Management and Budget as the seat of a “Micropolitan Statistical Area” (with a regional population of 31,464). Each of the other 10 are the seats of a “Metropolitan Statistical Area,” with regional populations north of 100,000.

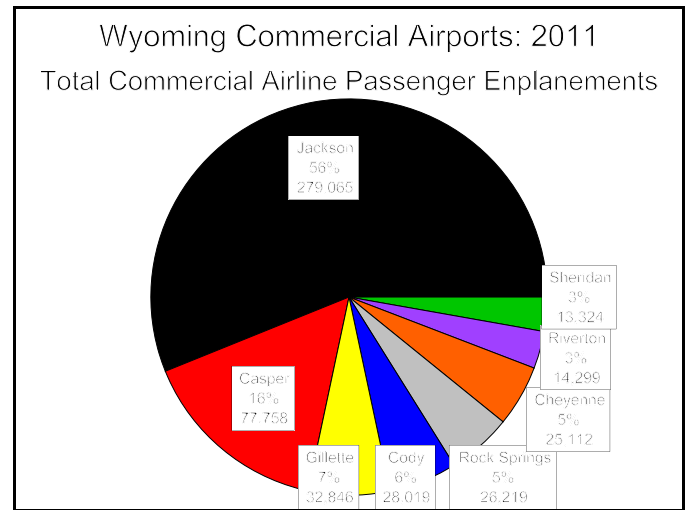
City	ST	2011 Enplanements	JAC as a %
Atlanta	GA	44,414,121	0.6%
Chicago (ORD)	IL	31,892,301	0.9%
Los Angeles	CA	30,528,737	0.9%
Fort Worth	TX	27,518,358	1.0%
Denver	CO	25,667,499	1.1%
New York (JFK)	NY	23,664,832	1.2%
San Francisco	CA	20,056,568	1.4%
Las Vegas	NV	19,872,617	1.4%
Phoenix	AZ	19,750,306	1.4%
Houston	TX	19,306,660	1.4%
Jackson	WY	279,065	

City	ST	2010 Area Population	Jackson Hole as a %	2011 Enplanements	JAC as a %	Enplanements/ Resident
Medford	OR	207,010	15%	301,742	92%	1.5
Missoula	MT	109,299	29%	292,501	95%	2.7
Mobile	AL	412,992	8%	288,461	97%	0.7
Bloomington-Normal	IL	169,572	19%	284,852	98%	1.7
Charleston	WV	304,214	10%	282,704	99%	0.9
Jackson	WY	31,464	100%	279,065	100%	8.9
Daytona Beach	FL	590,289	5%	274,166	102%	0.5
Fort Wayne	IN	421,409	7%	272,796	102%	0.6
Augusta	GA	564,873	6%	267,631	104%	0.5
Shreveport	LA	439,811	7%	265,104	105%	0.6
Fayetteville	NC	366,383	9%	259,445	108%	0.7

There is no comparison between the Jackson Hole Airport and other airports in Wyoming. In 2011, the Jackson Hole Airport accounted for more enplanements than the rest of Wyoming's airports combined. Casper was a distant second, recording barely a quarter as many as Jackson Hole. (Graph 1)

A third way to compare ourselves is to look at airports in other resort-oriented communities. Table 3 does this by looking at the 18 other airports near resort areas or national parks.

Two airports have more traffic than Jackson Hole. One is the grandiosely-named "Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport" (and in case you were wondering, the Bozeman Yellowstone International Airport has no scheduled international flights, and is over twice as far from Yellowstone as is the Jackson Hole Airport). The other is Key West, and both serve population centers 2-3 times larger than Jackson's airport.



Graph 1

Table 3
Resort Community Airports:
2011 Passenger Enplanements and Regional Population
(Sources: FAA & Census Bureau)

City	ST	2010 Area Population	Jackson Hole as a %	2011 Enplanements	JAC as a %	Enplanements/ Resident
Nantucket	MA	10,172	310%	169,352	165%	16.6
Jackson	WY	31,464	100%	279,065	100%	8.9
Aspen	CO	31,503	100%	221,256	126%	7.0
Key West	FL	73,090	43%	335,603	83%	4.6
Hayden	CO	23,509	134%	106,534	262%	4.5
Bozeman	MT	89,513	35%	397,870	70%	4.4
Durango	CO	51,334	61%	175,649	159%	3.4
Vineyard Haven	MA	16,535	191%	49,095	568%	3.0
Eagle	CO	73,537	43%	189,276	147%	2.6
Gunnison	CO	15,234	207%	36,516	764%	2.4
Montrose	CO	41,276	76%	87,228	320%	2.1
Kalispell	MT	90,928	35%	179,064	156%	2.0
Hailey	ID	27,701	114%	50,885	548%	1.8
Telluride	CO	7,360	428%	11,017	2533%	1.5
Grand Junction	CO	146,723	21%	217,988	128%	1.5
Idaho Falls	ID	133,265	24%	149,315	187%	1.1
Flagstaff	AZ	134,421	23%	60,831	459%	0.5
Hyannis	MA	216,902	15%	100,596	277%	0.5
St. George	UT	138,115	23%	48,582	574%	0.4

Three additional things pop off of Table 3.

First, in 2011, the Jackson Hole Airport had nearly twice as many enplanements as the Idaho Falls Airport. Take into consideration the number of 22 county license plates on cars in that airport's long-term parking lot, and it seems likely that if Idaho Falls didn't undercut Jackson Hole prices a goodly part of the year, the ratio would be more like three-to-one.

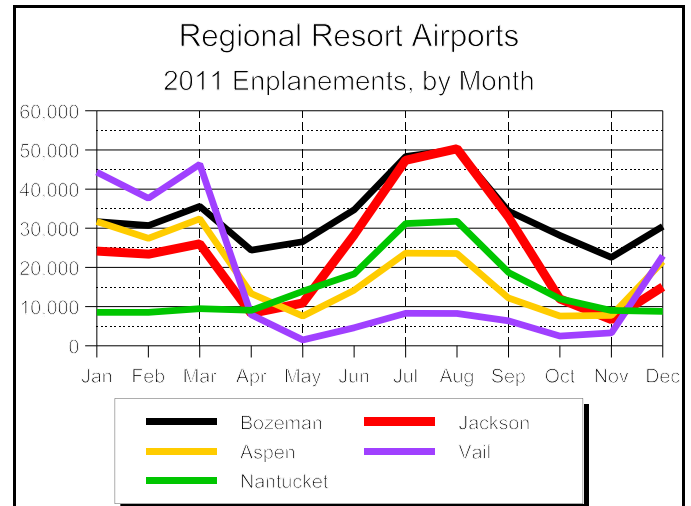
Second, dividing enplanements into population, the only airport with a higher ratio than Jackson Hole's is Nantucket's. This isn't really an apples-to-apples comparison though, for especially in the summer, Nantucket's housing prices are so dear that large numbers of workers fly to the island each day from the Massachusetts mainland. Combine this with residents' other travels back and forth to the mainland, and in 2011 on the order of 75 percent of all enplanements from Nantucket were on flights bound for Hyannis. (The other 25 percent of passengers were headed to a narrow array of airports, bounded by Boston on the north and Washington, DC on the south.)

Third, given our community's size, the only place that comes close to Jackson Hole in terms of the quality of air service is Aspen. That noted, our summers are so much busier than theirs that the comparison is far from perfect. (Graph 2)

For me the big take-away from this exercise is that we in Jackson Hole enjoy a profoundly phenomenal level of air service, another one of the embarrassment of riches of living here.

I get as mad as anyone else at the airlines and airport, and fully appreciate that the airport is a pretty easy – and sometimes deserving – target to blast, whether over airfares or board member trips or even whether there should be an airport at all. But as with so many aspects of Jackson Hole life, it's awfully easy to take truly great things

for granted, and fail to appreciate the extraordinary gifts which surround us every day. Our level of air service is one of them, a reality which has come about only because a lot of people have put in a lot of hard work over a long time. I'm grateful to them for what they've done, and for what they've accomplished.



Graph 2