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Southwest vs. United: The Real Truth Involving Hobby Airport

May 11, 2012 by: Edel Howlin

Hobby Airport has been caught in a war of words lately. On one side, you've got Southwest Airlines, looking to expand the airport. On the other side there's United Airlines trying to stop that expansion. Both airlines have penned reports on the impact for Houston. But who is telling the truth? And what's best for the customer?

Southwest and United airlines presented their case to Houston City Council earlier this week. **Southwest** say expanding Hobby and adding international travel will bring 10,000 new jobs and \$1.6 billion a year to the local economy.

Professor Praveen Kumar is with the University of Houston's Bauer College of Business. He agrees this potential growth is a good thing.

"Typically, what will happen is that as the prices go down because of competition, you know, the size of the market increases. Simply as the number of flier's increases, obviously they would have to be accommodated and that accommodation would require hiring new people, and that's where they're coming from in terms of the new jobs."

United believes this added competition means a loss of 3,700 jobs and nearly \$300 million dollars a year to Houston. Mainly because they would decide not to expand Terminal B at George Bush Intercontinental Airport.

And that bottom line is really what's best for the city of Houston and the airline's customers. That's where Tom Parsons with **Best Fares**, an airline comparison website, comes in.

"Southwest right now the thing that they've got in their advantage is the fact I think they have a much more friendlier customer service when it comes to refunds, changes and also baggage fees."

However Parsons says United has its own advantages especially when it comes to its loyal base of business customers.

"So they're a mean, lean flying machine they play the game they go after the business travelers, they treat them right. They do have the upgrade systems to take care of their Elite frequent fliers. United is a very strong competitor. Probably one of the best and they're still the biggest in the world."

Whether there's a place for two international terminals in Houston remains to be decided by City Council perhaps later this month. But both Parsons and Kumar agree competition is never a bad thing especially for the consumer.

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