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## Houston's Top Airport Official Says Yes To Southwest Expansion

April 9, 2012 by: Bill Stamps

**The man in charge of Houston's two airports has sent a letter to Mayor Parker giving his opinion on whether or not the city should help Southwest Airlines build an international terminal out of Hobby Airport. Mario Diaz made his recommendation public at a news conference.**

Houstonians wanting to fly out of the country currently have one choice locally -- that's Bush Intercontinental. Southwest Airlines would like to change that.

Southwest wants to build a new international terminal at **Hobby Airport** and begin international flights in three years, but it needs the city's support.

Mario Diaz is Houston's director of aviation.

*"The city must not be in the role and cannot be in the role of being federal regulators of commerce, air service commerce. The role that we can play is to do what we do everyday and that is to provide the facilities for airlines domestic or international, to provide service to Houston, connecting Houston with the world as we say."*

Diaz says his department hired two consultants to study the pros and cons. What they came up with is a project that would generate an extra 1 and 1/2 million passengers through the Houston area annually, an addition of 10,000 jobs and an economic impact of more than \$1.6 billion.

That's why Diaz says he supports the plan and will recommend the mayor do so as well.

*"The mayor has said that she wants at least 30 to continue listening to the public."*

If it's the public she's listening to, she'll probably hear comments from people like Sharon Jones, who travels with her daughter out of the country. Her daughter lives inside the loop and says a trip to Hobby would make things much easier.

*"We go to Europe, or Egypt, or Russia, so it would be a great convenience to have it closer to her home."*

United Airlines has come up with all sorts of reasons southwest shouldn't be allowed to offer International out of Hobby. But Diaz says a similar situation happened in Chicago when a smaller carrier began offering flights to South and Central America.

*"And in response the legacy carriers American and United increased their service out of Chicago Ohare by 26 percent and 49 percent respectively. Cut their prices, so much so that as the report details, you can fly from Chicago to many of the markets we're talking about in Central and South America, less expensively than you can out of Houston, despite the fact that Houston is a 1,000 miles closer. I think that speaks for itself."*

Diaz says the international terminal would be paid for by Southwest.

Statement from Mayor Parker:

"I am carefully considering Southwest's proposal and the recommendation of the city's aviation director and will take all views into account. With City Council involvement, we will convene meetings with and seek input from stakeholders, including airlines, members of the business community, Houston residents, organized labor and other interested persons. My decision, which I intend to reach by the end of April, will be based on what is best for the city and the flying public, not what may or may not be best for any one specific airline."

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