

July 25, 2019

To whom it may concern,

Western Oregon University (WOU) views adding regular and sustained commercial air service by a legacy carrier with west-coast hubs as a much-needed investment in the quality-of-life and economic vitality of the mid-Willamette Valley.

Our recently completed (2017-23) strategic plan, Forward Together, identified sustainability and stewardship as one of our five pillars of excellence. Commercial air service from Salem (SLE) would reduce our carbon footprint by decreasing the number of miles our students, faculty, staff, and visitors would need to drive to use an airport. The close proximity of SLE would also generate cost savings for WOU in terms of reduced mileage reimbursement, lower parking fees, and reduction in hotel nights needed to accommodate early morning departures and late-night arrivals.

Currently, WOU enrolls students from over 30 states and 9 nations. WOU was cited in a 2017 study by the “Chronicle of Higher Education” report as being the top mainland university or college destination for Hawaiian and Native Pacific Islander students, based upon percentage of students enrolled. For these and many other WOU students, air travel is required in order to get to campus from their homes. In addition, the university regularly hosts prospective students and their families who are engaged in the college search process. The logistics of having to fly into PDX, obtain a rental car and then drive over two hours (on a good day) just to get to WOU can be a meaningful obstacle to a student and their family that prevents their continued interest in attending WOU. Travel home for the breaks is a critical element in allowing students to remain connected to their families. Having an airport that is located less than 20 miles from campus would support our efforts to retain current students and recruit more students.

WOU is the only Division II intercollegiate athletic program in Oregon. Our teams compete with colleges and universities located in Alaska, Canada, Montana, Washington, California and Utah within our conference. We play teams from other states as well as part of our non-conference schedules. Many of these games require WOU teams to fly out-of-state, or for teams to fly to Oregon. Twice in the past two years WOU has hosted the NCAA Division II men’s regional basketball tournament. Teams attending that tournament have had to travel to WOU to participate. In addition, WOU regularly hosts conference championships in track and field and cross country. If available, flights to Salem would be highly appealing for WOU teams as well as visiting schools.

WOU faculty and staff regularly attend meetings and conferences out-of-state. Commercial air service from Salem would be highly appealing to those who travel for university business. The majority of WOU employees also live in the Mid-Willamette Valley and it is very likely that many would also use SLE for their personal travel.

WOU is hoping to expand our arts programs (Dance, Music, Theatre, and Visual Arts). The Smith Fine Arts Series brings artists in music and theatre to WOU. Improving the transportation logistics for visiting artists will support WOU's efforts to bring in national talent to perform in this established and well-respected series.

WOU applauds the community-driven effort to restore regular commercial air service to Oregon's state capital. The entire mid-Willamette Valley would benefit from their success. Western Oregon University is happy to support this work and we look forward to being able to use this service to enhance our efforts to provide students and the state with the highest quality education experience.

Sincerely,



David A. McDonald,  
Associate Vice President for Public Affairs and Strategic Initiatives

