



EXPERT Q&A

Private Jet Service Tradewind Aviation Adds Scheduled Boston-Westchester Route

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Tradewind VP David Zipkin talks:

- Wooing corporate business with Westchester-Boston scheduled service
- Working with TMCs & GDSs
- Competition with commercial carriers

just work with smaller carriers to feed their smaller stuff. Everyone is focused on LaGuardia, which is silly because of the mess that's going on over there. When we first launched the route, we thought it would be your Westchester and Fairfield folks going to Boston or your Boston folks going to that area, but we've seen about 30 percent of our travelers coming from Manhattan or New York. It was a surprise because of the distance to the airport, but they're telling us with the [ongoing construction] mess at LaGuardia, it's a lot easier to get up there. The Metro-North railroad goes every 20 minutes to White Plains, and it's a guaranteed 35-minute ride.

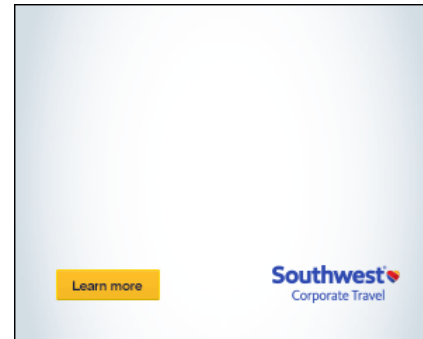
Up here, the big difference is the terminals that we use. We fly out of a private [fixed-base operator] like you would on a private charter. Our passengers show up 15 minutes before a flight time. They don't have to go through TSA or any of that. Their car is valet parked; they hang out in the lounge for a few minutes and walk out to the airplane. They're saving 45 minutes to an hour in both directions. When you save that much time and maybe tack on another 15 minutes to get to the city, you're still netting a much more efficient service.

The tickets are completely changeable, no fees. If you cancel outside three hours before

Tradewind Aviation has established itself as a private jet service to such tony leisure destinations as Martha's Vineyard, St. Barthelemy in the Caribbean and Vermont skiing destination Stowe. But about a year ago, it began targeting corporate travelers with scheduled service between Boston Logan's private terminal and Westchester County Airport near White Plains, N.Y. VP and co-founder David Zipkin spoke with BTN transportation editor Michael B. Baker.

BTN: How does the Boston Logan-Westchester route position Tradewind for the corporate market?

Zipkin: We're flying several times per day between Westchester and Boston, and we're the only scheduled route between [those cities] right now. Most of the major airlines are getting out of shorter routes. They're not into turboprops anymore, and they never really made money on that stuff, so they



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departure, full value goes on account for a year, so it's extremely flexible. We're first and foremost a private charter operator and do about 50 percent of our flights for private charter, so the idea is to apply the same flexibility to scheduled flights. We can even change names on the booking, which is unheard of with the airlines.

BTN: What's the frequency?

Zipkin: Two round-trips, morning and afternoon. Most people do a day trip. It starts at 6 a.m., which is our most popular flight. It's weekdays only, though we're thinking about doing Sundays, as well. The type of aircraft we fly is Pilatus PC-12. We operate 16 of them and are bringing two more onboard by the spring. We have scheduled flights and commit a certain amount of lift. If scheduled fills up, we add more. On more mature routes, it's not uncommon to have three or four airplanes leaving at every departure, so we can expand on high-demand days and contract out of it. There's nothing more expensive than flying an empty, large aircraft, so we're big believers in having that flexibility to grow and contract.

BTN: Are you competitive with fully refundable commercial airline fares?

Zipkin: Fully refundable is the good point. You can get the \$120 fare from JetBlue right now, but if you want the fully refundable one, it's comparable. We're \$395 for a regular one-way. It's an interesting market. JetBlue jumped in from LaGuardia to Boston, and it's one of the most heavily battled routes in the country. They're all in a pricing war. Delta used to be getting \$400 to \$600 a ticket, and now everyone has \$129 round-trip fares. It's not going to last, but they're battling for loyal customers. We don't really see ourselves as direct competitors for that because there's an inherent inefficiency to flying with the major airlines. We're flying eight passenger airplanes, so it takes about three minutes to board, close the door and get out of there.

BTN: Do you have other scheduled routes that cater largely to corporate travelers?

Zipkin: The next logical one would be Washington, D.C. A lot of our clients are asking for that, then Philly and so forth. We're looking at other possibilities.

BTN: And all of that will be out of Westchester?

Zipkin: For now. In our other routes—Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard started in 2002—we fly from Westchester and Teterboro, [N.J.] which is known for being only private charter. At Teterboro, we have a good footprint and base of operations, so we may consider that at some point. But it's about the same distance as LaGuardia and suffers from the same problem: You don't know how long it's going to take to get there, so you always have to give yourself an hour and a half, and there's no good train service out there. Westchester also has a lot of big companies based around there. We have a lot of people flying with us from GE because they were based in Fairfield, Conn., and now they're in Boston, and these executives still live in Connecticut and are traveling back and forth. PepsiCo and IBM are right down the road, and Morgan Stanley is now literally on the same road as the airport.

BTN: Tradewind is in the global distribution systems. Are you in corporate booking tools, as well?

Zipkin: We're now on Concur's preferred vendor list. Our two-letter code is TJ. That was a Peruvian airline back in the '70s that is long since defunct, but in some of these booking tools, they still have it tagged. Finally, we got that straightened out and are in there. Our biggest booker is probably [American Express Global] Business Travel. We're in Sabre, Amadeus and all the Travelport properties, which is rare for an operator like us. There are a few companies sort of trying to do the same thing, and a lot are doing it on a membership basis, where you pay a certain amount per year and are not even considering the traditional distribution channels, but I think that's a big mistake. We acknowledge and realize that travel agencies, especially on the corporate side, are a big part of our business. Overall, we see about 40 percent of our bookings through agencies. We have some strong, loyal agencies—Frosch, Altour and Ovation—and we're going to continue to work closely with them to build out those channels.

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BTN: Do you have corporate rates?

Zipkin: I'm in conversations with BCD and Carlson Wagonlit. We've done it with Ovation, where we have a private fare we publish through ATPCO. The commitment is that they will book a certain amount, just like any contract. The big ones—it's a tough nut to crack because we're so small that they don't feel like they need to put a big contract in place. We just started it, so I don't think they know quite what the numbers are looking like, so they'll probably come around and want to do that.

BTN: What about working with companies directly on the Logan-Westchester route?

Zipkin: We discount on a volume basis. We sell a ticket book. A lot of the GE folks and IBM folks who fly with us frequently will pre-purchase. The pricing goes all the way down to \$295 when you purchase it that way. The tickets are good for a year, but the value never goes away. At the end of the year, if they haven't used the tickets, the dollar value turns into dollars, which they can use to repurchase tickets. You can buy a ticket book and share it amongst your colleagues. We're seeing all different industries: a lot of finance, a lot of legal, a lot of education. We have a few Harvard professors who go back and forth. Also, pharma and biotech is big because Boston is known for that.

BTN: What sort of corporate travelers use Tradewind?

Zipkin: We have the private charter side, which is the highest-level executive. On the shuttles, we're seeing second- and third-level folks who are approved to spend a little more for business class but are not approved to fly a \$5,000 charter each way. A lot still have to run it through their regular expense system. When I was first speaking with these companies or the agencies that work with them, I was surprised to see that even at the second- or third-highest level, they have to justify the expense. They can't splurge. It's very well controlled. I assisted them in making the case. Looking at our cost—we're \$100 to \$200 more—they're saving three hours on the round-trip, so what extra business can you get done in that time? Or the car service you're saving on LaGuardia to Westchester? Once I made that case, they had no problem.

BTN: You mentioned valet parking as an amenity. That's provided by the airports?

Zipkin: Yes. The way they make their money is fuel sales, so they're trying to attract as many jets to fly in and out of there so they can make their money pumping fuel. It's like a glorified gas station, really, so they roll out the red carpet: free value parking, a nice lounge with snacks, a business room.

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