

City of Melbourne



City Manager's Office

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May 8, 2020

Secretary Elaine L. Chao
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Chao,

The City of Melbourne, Florida has recently become aware that Delta Air Lines has petitioned the U.S. Department of Transportation to suspend all service to the Orlando Melbourne International Airport (MLB) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While we understand that Delta has financial concerns, the City of Melbourne strongly believes that Delta should not be permitted to suspend service to MLB, even temporarily.

Please consider that Delta provides nearly 70 percent of MLB's scheduled air service. Discontinuing availability of this essential transportation option, even for a short period, will have negative impacts on our area businesses, discourage investors working with our federal Economic Opportunity Zone, and will hinder accessibility to major Department of Defense (DoD) programs. In addition, MLB continues to be the lowest Cost Per Enplanement in Delta's Florida network and provides it the opportunity to operate at a much lower cost than airports that are temporarily discounting their rates and charges. Further, MLB has deferred all expenses for three months.

A primary justification for suspending service was based upon limiting flight crew exposure to the virus. We believe that rerouting flight crews through a much larger, more populated MCO terminal actually increases risks rather than efficiently transiting a smaller, less crowded MLB terminal. Our Airport has implemented the latest cleaning procedures and sterilization technology, exceeding all standards provided by system operations.

The number of advanced bookings were heavily weighed without any contemplation of actual ticket price or the associated higher yield of business-related travel. Business travelers compose the majority of MLB traffic and tend to make reservations with less lead time than low yielding leisure travelers. Several references were made of stations that had a handful more advance reservations. The true financial impact to Delta is quickly overcome with modest differences in fare, in which MLB is a leader.

According Delta station management, advanced bookings at MLB are trending upwards. This positive direction is understandable since the Governor's stay at home orders have expired and business travel authorization is being reinstated. It should be noted that this is not the case for southern Florida where Delta has duplicate service at PBI, FLL, and MIA.

The Orlando Melbourne International Airport and Delta Air Lines have shared a long and successful partnership. The City of Melbourne believes strongly that Delta should continue this relationship and continue all service at MLB, which is critical to the health of our businesses and community. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Shannon M. Lewis", is written over a horizontal line.

Shannon M. Lewis
City Manager