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Frontier to return to Port Columbus with flights to four cities

By **JD Malone** *The Columbus Dispatch* • Wednesday January 13, 2016 1:56 AM



Frontier began flying out of Cincinnati in 2013, bringing a budget alternative to an airport long known for high fares.

Frontier Airlines is coming back to Port Columbus, and this time, the discount carrier plans to stick around.

The Denver-based airline announced new service from Columbus to Denver; Orlando, Fla.; Las Vegas; and Philadelphia beginning in May and June.

"It's great to be announcing sunny destinations on a cold, wintry day," said Daniel Shurz, Frontier's chief commercial officer. "It's great to be back in Columbus, and back to stay. I guarantee it."

Columbus has lacked a low-cost airline since the days of Skybus, and the competition Frontier brings should trigger other carriers, such as Delta, Southwest and American Airlines, to lower fares, said David Whitaker, vice president of business development for the Columbus Regional Airport Authority.

"They will all compete," Whitaker said. "That will be good for Columbus."

An industry observer agrees.

"It keeps the competition awake," said Michael Boyd of the Boyd Group, an aviation-consulting firm in Evergreen, Colo. "That's always good."

Frontier's destinations from Columbus are popular routes served by other carriers at Port Columbus — which will put pressure on fares.

To kick off its service here, Frontier will offer fares as low as \$19 one-way to Philadelphia this summer. Introductory fares are available to book now online.

“We are fundamentally lower-cost than any other airline at this airport,” Shurz said.

The company added 18 new planes to its fleet and has announced expanded service in dozens of new markets this year.

Frontier offered flights from Columbus in 2013 and 2014, and both times shut down operations.

This is a different Frontier, Boyd said. The airline has found a lot of success with this formula, he said.

“This should be a home run,” Boyd said. “With (Ohio State University), Honda and those other companies and financial institutions, it should be a wild success.”

Shurz said the strategy for Columbus is similar to strategies that have worked in Cincinnati and Cleveland.

Frontier entered those markets with a few high-volume destinations and added flights and cities over the years as business grew.

Whitaker said Port Columbus is coming off 7 percent passenger growth in 2015, which was the airport’s fourth-best year based on passenger volume, and this year looks to be at least that good, if not better.

“This is a huge addition,” Whitaker said. “2016 looked like it might be our second-best year before this; 2017 might be our best ever.”