

# Pushing to use American Airlines flights out of the Laughlin/Bullhead International Airport



Jack Penning, right, of Volaire Aviation Consulting, and Jeremy Keating, director of Laughlin-Bullhead International Airport, give an update Monday at Kingman Airport on American Airlines' daily scheduled flights from Bullhead City to Phoenix. They're encouraging more local citizens to use the service instead of driving to Las Vegas.

By **Hubble Ray Smith**

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KINGMAN – American Airlines' daily flight from Bullhead City to Phoenix is light on its load, and Jack Penning is pushing to get more local residents to use the service before a two-year grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation runs out.

Penning, managing partner of Volaire Aviation Consulting in Portland, Oregon, said the magic number for American Airlines is 78. The target price for a one-way fare is \$78 and the load occupancy needed to break even at that price is 78 percent, Penning said Monday during an update at Kingman Airport.

“That would be my ultimate target,” he said. “So it’s totally dependent on traffic whether we make money. We have a ways to get there. That’s okay. We have the grant for now.” At 50 percent load, the break-even price is \$123 one way.

Penning worked with Jeremy Keating, aviation director at Laughlin-Bullhead City International Airport, to bring daily scheduled service to the airport for the first time in 20 years. The inaugural flight aboard the 70-seat Bombardier CRJ700 passenger jet was Feb. 16.

Inbound passengers visiting Laughlin are essential to the flight's success, but those numbers drop off during the summer when more people drive to Laughlin with their boats and jet skis. That's why Penning is pleading with locals to use the service. "When we talked to people about the service to Phoenix, they think only about service to Phoenix," he said. "They don't realize that by the time you watch a movie, you could be in 70 cities. The connections are quick and easy."

Penning said his firm spent more than \$400,000 advertising the flights, including about \$200,000 in "in-kind," or at-cost, advertising from Lamar and ClearChannel. They're getting the word out through digital advertising and a variety of media such as Facebook and Twitter, which is least expensive, along with radio, TV and print ads. Keating said he's gone door to door to businesses along U.S. Highway 95 to stir interest in the flights.

About 20 percent of American Airlines' passengers on the Bullhead City flight are just going to Phoenix. The rest are connecting to other cities, with Minneapolis by far the most popular at 18 percent, nearly the same as Phoenix. Other connections are Denver, Dallas, Portland, Detroit, Seattle and Sacramento, California. The flights won't be perfect for everyone, and in some cases, it's going to be cheaper to go to Las Vegas, Penning acknowledged. "All we can ask from you folks is to check it against Vegas. If it doesn't make sense, no hard feelings," he said.

Penning hammers home an important consideration: free parking for an unlimited time at Bullhead City. Compare that with \$10 a day for the cheapest remote parking at McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas.

Mohave County Supervisor Hildy Angius, who attended Monday's update, likes the convenience factor. She said it took her 9 minutes to get from her home in Bullhead City to the airport and through security for the American Airlines flight.

Las Vegas was getting about 2,100 people a day coming up from Laughlin, Bullhead City and Lake Havasu City to fly out of McCarran, and all Penning needs is 55 of them to achieve the 78 percent load. Keating wants travelers to download the American Airlines app and watch for special deals out of IFP (International Fun Place), which is Bullhead's airport code. "We have a lot of people who know about it (Bullhead flights), but they still use Las Vegas," he said. "People say it's too expensive, and once they hear that, they never look again. They need to continue to look."