

The following is a presentation of data showing annual operations (totals and trends) for three Delta hub airports in the middle part of the U.S., at Detroit, Cincinnati, and Memphis. All data was copied from FAA's ATADS system.

Here is a screencap showing data for one of the current Delta hubs, Detroit:

ATCT	Year	AC	AT	LCL-GA	LCL-TOTAL	TOTAL OPS	yr-to-yr, TOTAL change	TOTAL, 2017 vs peak year	COMM	yr-to-yr COMM change	%comm	%lcl	Year
DTW [Detroit, MI]													
1991		270,784	74,023	0	0	396,278			344,807		87%	0%	1991
1992		285,373	87,995	0	0	427,383	8%		373,368	8%	87%	0%	1992
1993		300,498	96,179	0	0	462,482	8%		396,675	6%	86%	0%	1993
1994		322,007	94,473	0	0	485,306	5%		416,480	5%	86%	0%	1994
1995		335,875	96,259	0	0	508,040	5%		432,134	4%	85%	0%	1995
1996		351,249	102,668	0	0	538,554	6%		453,917	5%	84%	0%	1996
1997		350,651	107,151	0	0	541,216	0%		457,802	1%	85%	0%	1997
1998		334,080	118,428	0	0	538,153	-1%		452,508	-1%	84%	0%	1998
1999		329,459	156,808	1	1	559,548	4%		486,267	7%	87%	0%	1999
2000		327,207	180,313	171	171	554,580	-1%		487,520	0%	88%	0%	2000
2001		319,118	157,689	2,320	2,323	523,039	-6%		476,807	-2%	91%	0%	2001
2002		341,244	131,588	5,967	5,967	497,564	-5%		472,830	-1%	95%	1%	2002
2003		324,615	150,391	2,297	2,297	493,416	-1%		475,006	0%	96%	0%	2003
2004		331,629	175,694	733	733	522,641	6%		507,323	7%	97%	0%	2004
2005		315,031	193,480	1,050	1,065	522,964	0%		508,511	0%	97%	0%	2005
2006		289,637	179,458	392	407	482,147	-8%		469,095	-8%	97%	0%	2006
2007		271,034	185,105	484	521	467,755	-3%		456,139	-3%	98%	0%	2007
2008		241,757	212,129	5	9	463,793	-1%		453,886	0%	98%	0%	2008
2009		207,711	217,873	0	0	432,589	-7%		425,584	-6%	98%	0%	2009
2010		195,506	250,145	0	0	452,616	5%		445,651	5%	98%	0%	2010
2011		189,493	247,041	0	0	443,028	-2%		436,534	-2%	99%	0%	2011
2012		218,736	202,822	0	0	427,814	-3%		421,558	-3%	99%	0%	2012
2013		229,580	190,178	0	0	425,732	0%		419,738	0%	99%	0%	2013
2014		243,117	143,122	0	0	392,635	-8%		386,239	-8%	98%	0%	2014
2015		276,898	96,533	0	0	379,376	-3%		373,431	-3%	98%	0%	2015
2016		287,584	99,581	0	0	393,427	4%		387,165	4%	98%	0%	2016
2017		302,118	87,065	0	0	395,357	0%	-29%	389,183	1%	98%	0%	2017

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Look at the green text column, showing commercial operations (COMM). Peak year was 2005. Notice the declines since 2012, from 422K to 387K in 2016, a drop of 35K commercial ops. *Did 'demand' for air travel in/out of the Detroit area drop that much in those years? Of course not. Rather, the airlines chose to reallocate assets (aircraft, crews, and scheduled flights) to other hubs.*

Here is another screencap, for another Delta-dominated hub, in Memphis:

ATCT	Year	AC	AT	LCL-GA	LCL-TOTAL	TOTAL OPS	yr-to-yr. TOTAL change	TOTAL, 2017 vs peak year	COMM	yr-to-yr COMM change	%comm	%lcl	Year
KEY: AC = air carrier; AT = air taxi; GA = general aviation; OPS = annual operations; LCL = local ops; TOTAL = all ops; COMM = sum of AC & AT.													
MEM [Memphis, TN]													
1991	168,040	90,488	953	1,119	325,872				258,506		79%	0%	1991
1992	168,817	112,227	788	947	346,180	6%			280,844	9%	81%	0%	1992
1993	172,458	99,289	444	819	338,041	-2%			271,747	-3%	80%	0%	1993
1994	180,598	100,041	244	471	349,373	3%			280,639	3%	80%	0%	1994
1995	189,998	99,343	158	191	359,846	3%			289,341	3%	80%	0%	1995
1996	192,178	103,508	445	458	360,599	0%			295,684	2%	82%	0%	1996
1997	195,878	109,284	85	103	369,654	3%			304,960	3%	82%	0%	1997
1998	188,504	108,290	28	28	364,703	-1%			296,794	-3%	81%	0%	1998
1999	204,112	103,484	0	0	374,817	3%			307,576	4%	82%	0%	1999
2000	218,921	108,285	0	0	386,335	3%			327,186	6%	85%	0%	2000
2001	228,038	114,940	0	0	393,925	2%			340,978	4%	87%	0%	2001
2002	241,878	109,538	38	47	398,479	1%			351,416	3%	88%	0%	2002
2003	229,148	132,377	8	11	402,362	1%			361,523	3%	90%	0%	2003
2004	212,259	130,805	8	23	381,036	-5%			343,064	-5%	90%	0%	2004
2005	223,707	133,525	0	0	394,614	4%			357,232	4%	91%	0%	2005
2006	212,571	140,837	0	0	387,893	-2%			353,408	-1%	91%	0%	2006
2007	212,347	132,729	0	0	376,528	-3%			345,076	-2%	92%	0%	2007
2008	208,188	130,889	0	0	362,978	-4%			338,877	-2%	93%	0%	2008
2009	200,554	118,375	0	0	339,007	-7%			318,929	-6%	94%	0%	2009
2010	191,320	124,837	0	0	336,017	-1%			316,157	-1%	94%	0%	2010
2011	185,043	108,857	0	0	311,791	-7%			291,700	-8%	94%	0%	2011
2012	172,729	77,977	0	0	271,321	-13%			250,706	-14%	92%	0%	2012
2013	163,719	49,359	250	424	234,278	-14%			213,078	-15%	91%	0%	2013
2014	160,888	34,143	355	839	219,853	-6%			194,809	-9%	89%	0%	2014
2015	168,545	28,922	178	390	219,171	0%			195,467	0%	89%	0%	2015
2016	180,804	20,488	72	178	224,883	3%			201,292	3%	90%	0%	2016
2017	184,958	15,495	89	180	223,357	-1%	-44%		200,451	0%	90%	0%	2017

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This example is a little more complicated, because of FedEx. FAA's 'commercial ops' counts include not just passenger flights but also cargo flights, and KMEM is the home hub for FedEx. But, since air cargo has been a strong industry, the substantial declines in commercial operations (see the red boxed percentage drops, especially 2011-2014) generally reflect a withdrawal of operating assets by Delta and Delta's feeders. *As above, ask yourself: did 'demand' for air travel in/out of the Memphis area drop that much in those years? Of course not.* This is another example of how airlines, in this case Delta, drive operational growth (and decline) for profit margins, via the hubbing model. This has NOTHING to do with real passenger demand.

OK, here is one more example related to Delta, and this is the most extreme case. Once upon a time, one of the busiest hubs in the U.S. was serving the Cincinnati area, via an airport in nearby Covington, KY [KCVG]. The airport was a near-total monopoly hub for Delta. Enormous federal funds were spent developing terminals and multiple parallel runways, just like is going on now at Seattle. Then, one day, Delta decided to leave; well, they did not totally leave as Delta still had nearly 100% of all flights in December 2013, but they scaled down immensely. Perhaps the airport authority was asking for too much, and perhaps other airport authorities were offering tax incentives and other sweet deals, so Delta chose to move most of their hub operations elsewhere. Flights in 2017 were down 71% from the peak year, 2004. Here's the KCVG ATADS screencap:

ATCT	Year	AC	AT	LCL-GA	LCL-TOTAL	TOTAL OPS	yr-to-yr, TOTAL change	TOTAL, 2017 vs peak year	COMM	yr-to-yr COMM change	%comm	%lcl	Year
KEY: AC = air carrier; AT = air taxi; GA = general aviation; OPS = annual operations; LCL = local ops; TOTAL = all ops; COMM = sum of AC & AT.													
CVG [Covington, KY]													
1991	144,970	135,955	21	21	298,044			280,925		94%	0%		1991
1992	153,113	139,449	0	0	305,544	3%		292,562	4%	96%	0%		1992
1993	152,467	145,288	0	0	312,104	2%		297,753	2%	95%	0%		1993
1994	155,312	168,120	0	0	339,839	9%		323,432	9%	95%	0%		1994
1995	168,441	180,508	0	0	365,114	7%		348,949	8%	96%	0%		1995
1996	189,782	198,072	0	0	401,367	10%		385,834	11%	96%	0%		1996
1997	343,493	55,412	0	0	416,894	4%		398,905	3%	96%	0%		1997
1998	326,784	91,521	0	0	443,070	6%		418,305	5%	94%	0%		1998
1999	188,023	258,459	0	0	476,128	7%		444,482	6%	93%	0%		1999
2000	180,437	265,507	0	0	477,844	0%		445,944	0%	93%	0%		2000
2001	158,105	200,872	0	0	386,388	-19%		356,977	-20%	92%	0%		2001
2002	153,997	308,812	0	0	485,156	26%		460,809	29%	95%	0%		2002
2003	141,788	348,194	0	0	505,557	4%		487,982	6%	97%	0%		2003
2004	177,532	329,193	0	0	515,851	2%		506,725	4%	98%	0%		2004
2005	165,397	322,431	3	4	495,452	-4%		487,828	-4%	98%	0%		2005
2006	93,312	245,584	0	0	345,758	-30%		338,896	-31%	98%	0%		2006
2007	90,151	231,313	0	0	328,261	-5%		321,464	-5%	98%	0%		2007
2008	78,804	201,174	0	0	286,068	-13%		279,778	-13%	98%	0%		2008
2009	68,878	149,478	0	0	222,791	-22%		218,354	-22%	98%	0%		2009
2010	67,527	105,207	0	0	177,610	-20%		172,734	-21%	97%	0%		2010
2011	71,428	85,941	0	0	162,422	-9%		157,367	-9%	97%	0%		2011
2012	63,801	74,918	0	0	143,578	-12%		138,519	-12%	96%	0%		2012
2013	60,921	71,818	0	0	137,741	-4%		132,739	-4%	96%	0%		2013
2014	62,501	65,828	0	0	133,619	-3%		128,129	-3%	96%	0%		2014
2015	78,868	50,098	0	0	133,225	0%		126,966	-1%	95%	0%		2015
2016	87,508	43,239	0	0	137,225	3%		130,745	3%	95%	0%		2016
2017	112,852	31,783	0	0	150,463	10%	-71%	144,435	10%	96%	0%		2017

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Check out the year-to-year COMM change column. It shows how this hub exploded in growth throughout the 1990s, and it shows a total recovery – and continued growth – after the decline in 2001 (related to 9/11). And then, it shows the hub withdrawal by Delta. This airport peaked at 507K commercial ops in 2004 (which is **24% MORE OPS** than the 409K at SeaTac in 2016!), but declined 69% to a mere 127K commercial operations in 2015. Look a little further in time and note that, in the next two years, KCVG commercial ops have recovered somewhat, regaining 10% in 2016 alone. *Now, one more time, ask yourself: did the good people in the Cincinnati area lose their 'demand' for air travel over that decade and are they suddenly regaining a hunger for air travel? Of course not.*