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## New Jet Service Soars into Buchanan Field

By Peggy Spear



Photo provided by JetSuiteX

Contra Costa County is taking off.

Quite literally, as a new charter jet service is roaring to life at the East Bay's Buchanan Field.

JetSuiteX, a new venture from private jet company JetSuite, launched their first flights from Concord to Burbank earlier this month, offering round-trips up to three times daily, as well as a weekend jaunt to Las Vegas.

"The JetSuite X service provides an exciting alternative to driving to Oakland for county residents and brings additional commerce to Buchanan Airport area businesses," says County Supervisor Candace Andersen. "I am delighted to welcome the service to Contra Costa County".

The value of the service is easy to see, says her colleague, Supervisor Karen Mitchoff. The "scheduled charters" are a great option for business travelers in the county who usually would have relied on quick trips from Oakland, San Francisco or even San Jose airports, fighting rush-hour travel.

The planes themselves are refurbished American Eagle jets, according to Keith Freitas, director of airports at Buchanan Field and the Byron Airport. They will serve up to 30 passengers at a time.

The inaugural price will be \$109 one-way, and go upwards to \$300 as demand increases, and depending on the day of the week people need to fly, said Gareth Edmondson-Jones, a spokesperson for JetSuiteX.

The other advantage of the flights is that passengers won't have to endure long TSA screening lines. "But that doesn't mean the travel is unsafe," Edmondson-Jones said. Passengers will still be screened to make sure they are not on the "No-fly" list, and be checked for any explosive devices. There will be other security measures in place, he said, but was not at liberty to go into detail as to what they were.

"But rest assured, there will be visible and invisible security all around," Edmondson-Jones said.

Both Freitas and Edmondson-Jones downplayed the noise level that the jets would create. "We already have charter jets taking off from Buchanan, so it will only be about four more flights per day," Freitas said. And Edmondson-Jones said that the JetSuiteX planes were "some of the quietest" out there.

With the new service,

JetSuiteX has plans to refurbish the old PSA terminal at the airport, which was, in essence, a double-wide modular building, Freitas said.

The decision to begin service from Buchanan was a "no-brainer," Edmondson-Jones said. "There's a sizeable amount of people who fly for business between southern California and the Bay Area each

day, and many come from Contra Costa County."

He says that the idea came from an old Jet Blue model, which looked at underused airports in urban areas - specifically Long Beach and JFK in New York - and saw how there were "millions of people who lived near these airports and didn't take advantage of them because there weren't services they needed." Jet Blue went in and started offering flights and in the case of Long Beach, saw a huge revitalization. "Jet Blue made a go of Long Beach, and JetSuiteX wants to do the same thing here."

The weekend trips to Las Vegas - which leave Friday and return Sunday - are sure to be popular, Edmondson-Jones said, as it will attract those who want to get away for a little fun, as well.

Another demographic that JetSuiteX did not take into account are college-age kids who want to make the jaunt home from Southern California schools.

It makes sense, says Kish Rajan of Walnut Creek, the former Director for Governor Office of Business and Economic Development (GO Biz) who currently works with the Southern California Leadership Council. Not only did he see the economic advantages of for both Contra Costa and Burbank, but he himself will be a frequent traveler on the flights several times a week.

"Flying into Burbank is so much easier," he said. "LAX is a monster. Plus, Buchanan is right near my home, so I don't have to fight traffic coming from Oakland or San Francisco."

He said that these types of scheduled charters are the wave of the future. "It's almost like the 'Uberization' of air travel," he said. "We're repositioning our assets in a new way."

But perhaps the biggest impact will be on the economy the East Bay, Mitchoff said.

"We are much closer to the wine country and other attractions here at Buchanan," she said. "It makes sense for the tourists who want to come and not pay top-dollar San Francisco prices and can enjoy what Contra Costa and the surrounding areas offer."

Lafayette Chamber of Commerce President Jay Lifson says it may take a while to see the economic impact in Lamorinda communities, but that the convenience of having a user-friendly airline this side of the tunnel is great. "It's a fantastic option for travelers," he said.

Lori McAdams of Lafayette is a recent JetSuiteX user who flew to Burbank. She said her trip to Concord converted a two-and-one half hour trip to the Oakland airport into a one-hour trip. McAdams said passengers do not go through the usual TSA lines, "although they do swab your hands."

Her flight had 20 passengers on a 30-passenger plane with a pilot and a flight attendant, who was also training to be a pilot ("a back-up pilot," McAdams said). "It was like being on your rich friend's plane!"

It is also a boon for Buchanan Field itself, Freitas said. "We do a lot to educate the community about what we offer here," he said. "This will allow us more visibility, and show what gem we have."

It remains to be seen how consumers greet the new service, but Edmondson-Jones is positive about the response. "We're in it for the long haul," he said.

For more information, contact Contra Costa Airports, call 844-Fly-ToUs or visit online at [www.ContraCostaAirports.org](http://www.ContraCostaAirports.org).

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