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Wash. flights planned for Williams Gateway

Tour company to begin offering 4 trips a week between Mesa airport, Bellingham

David van den Berg
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A Washington state-based tour company is expected to begin offering flights between Williams Gateway Airport and Bellingham, Wash., starting Jan. 19.

Western will lease a Boeing 737 from Nevada-based Xtra Airways, and will offer four flights a week. Interested passengers can start booking tickets online today at www.iflywestern.com, and sale fares will start at \$59 each way. Flights will be offered on Sundays, Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays, and will arrive at Williams Gateway at 5:55 p.m., departing for Bellingham, which is 90 miles north of Seattle, at 6:35 p.m.

"This has a good connection to the northwestern United States and Canada, both of which have strong interest in traveling to the Phoenix-Mesa market," airport spokesman Brian Sexton said.

Seattle was one of the airport's 10-most requested destinations in a marketing survey, Sexton said.

Bellingham is about 50 miles from Vancouver, B.C.

The company could receive incentives for starting service at Williams Gateway. The Williams Gateway Airport Authority Board is scheduled to consider Monday a four-month landing fee waiver, a two-month terminal use fee waiver, and a reduced fee of \$225 for fuel storage and for airport staff and equipment needed to fuel the plane each time, Sexton said.

The airport has also offered \$40,000, and the Mesa Convention and Visitors Bureau has offered \$30,000 in support of the airline's marketing campaign.

"This is our third operator so each one is a case-by-case basis determined by their business plan, frequency of service, type of aircraft and other factors as well,"

Sexton said.

The tour company's business plan is to serve smaller and midsize markets with underserved airports and connect them to popular leisure destinations in the western United States, said Leigh-Ann Campbell, Western's public relations and advertising manager. Williams Gateway serves both of those needs, she said.

The company is reviving the Western Airlines name, Campbell said. Delta Air Lines acquired Western in the 1980s.

Western would be the third company offering frequent charter flights at Williams Gateway, and the fourth overall. Vision Airlines offers four weekly flights between the Mesa airport and North Las Vegas, Nev. Sky Value is scheduled to begin offering twice-weekly flights to Gary, Ind., next month. Allegiant Airlines offers occasional charters to Reno and Laughlin, Nev.

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