

# Port Authority, operator of Stewart Airport, may take over Atlantic City Airport

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The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which operates Stewart International Airport near Newburgh, is considering taking over Atlantic City International Airport in New Jersey.

Richard Gerentine, an Ulster County legislator and the county's representative on the Stewart Airport Commission, said he doesn't see the move as the Port Authority slighting Stewart because the agency has committed a significant amount of money to Stewart's future.

"They have expended a substantial of money on upgrades to Stewart itself, on the runway, on the lighting. They have a projected project for the terminal parking," said Gerentine, R-Marlboro. "So they have not been bashful about spending money there.

"Unfortunately, the way the economy is, some of the (airlines) have not continued service or decreased their service there," Gerentine added. "But I know they are doing everything to try to upgrade the airport itself to expand the service there."

Stewart was served by eight airlines when the Port Authority took over operation of the state-owned airport from a British company in late 2007. Today there are three — JetBlue, Delta, and USAirways.

Gerentine noted, however, that the Port Authority has been successful in increasing the amount of cargo that goes through Stewart.

"They have done ... a great job of expanding the cargo service there," he said. "... That has been increasing dramatically over the last 18 months."

The Port Authority says 10,258 tons of cargo passed through Stewart in the first half of 2012, up 14.2 percent from the first half of 2011.

But passenger volume is falling. The authority says the airport served 225,579 people in the first half of 2012, down 3.1 percent from the same period in 2011.

Atlantic City International Airport was used by 1.4 million travelers in 2010, an all-time high for the facility.

Port Authority Deputy Executive Director Bill Baroni said in a press release that the

agency's \$3 million study of taking over the Atlantic City airport recognizes an increased demand for air service.

"Adding Atlantic City International Airport has the potential to bring another critical asset to the Port Authority's already extensive aviation portfolio," Baroni said. "Significant growth is expected in the region's aviation travel, and studying the addition of another commercial airport is a prudent action for this agency to undertake to help foster economic growth and reduce flight congestion."

Said Port Authority Chairman David Samson: "We need to explore all available options to expand our services for our passengers and businesses using our air cargo facilities. Atlantic City International Airport may provide a good fit with our current air operations, easing congestion and opening up new opportunities."

J.J. Hanson, a spokesman for Ulster County Executive Michael Hein, agreed with Gerentine's assessment that the Port Authority's Atlantic City study will not lessen the agency's attention to Stewart.

"I don't see any indication that the Port Authority is going to reduce its commitment to Stewart or the Hudson Valley," he said. "The Port Authority has made considerable investment into the facility since taking it over."

In addition to Stewart, the Port Authority operates John F. Kennedy and LaGuardia international airports in New York City and Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey.

Last December, the authority said it was planning a \$19.9 million improvement project at Stewart, \$42 million worth of upgrades at Newark Liberty and a combined \$74 million worth of work at Kennedy and LaGuardia.

The Stewart work is to include expanding the airport's terminal by 30,000 square feet.