**Beyond Midway and O’Hare:**

**The Evolution of Scheduled Air Service from Gary, Meigs Field, Valparaiso and other Smaller Airports in the Chicago Region**

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 **Abstract**

The evolution of scheduled air service from Chicago’s two major airports—Midway and O’Hare—has been extensively evaluated in the academic and professional literature (Young, 2003, Branigan, 2011). Little analysis has been conducted, however, about the services that have been provided from the other airports in the metropolitan region.

This paper attempts to fill this gap by reviewing the evolution of these services since 1940. It considers the service provided from Gary-Chicago, Glenview, Michigan City, and Valparaiso, Ind., Meigs Field, and a specially designed heliport facility once serving Winnetka, Ill. Several airports outside the metropolitan region, particularly Chicago Rockford, South Bend/Michiana, and Milwaukee Mitchell airports, are also briefly discussed.

The paper concludes with perspective on how the “economic geography” of metropolitan Chicago has affected attempts to provide air services from smaller airports and considers why no clear “third airport alternative” has yet emerged to relieve pressure on Midway and O’Hare.

**Introduction**

By most commonly accepted measures, the scale of scheduled air services available from points within the City of Chicago has had no equal in American aviation for at least 70 years. Midway was followed by O’Hare as the world’s busiest airport between the 1930s and 2005. When flights from these airports are added together, more passengers and scheduled passenger planes depart from within the boundaries of the City of Chicago—and fly nonstop to more destinations—than any other city in the country.

Airports outside the city limits, however, have fared poorly in the development of scheduled service. None has consistently sustained service to points outside the metropolitan region since the earliest days of aviation. Today, service is limited to a mere four departures and arrivals each week from Gary-Chicago Airport. The construction of a new suburban airport, while embraced with great enthusiasm by many, has been effectively “on hold” for years.

The history of scheduled service from these secondary airports is nonetheless filled with moments of optimism and opportunity. To better understand why the hopes for scheduled service consistently ended in disappointment—and what it means for the development of airports in the future—this paper reviews the evolution of scheduled services since 1940 from Gary, Glenview, Michigan City, and Valparaiso, Ind., Chicago’s Meigs Field, and a heliport in Winnetka, Ill.

 **Background**

Planning and developing airports in metropolitan Chicago have been subject to volatile politics for more than 25 years. Factions have warred over plans to expand O’Hare International Airport and build new airports at both Lake Calumet on the city’s far south side and near south-suburban Peotone. To some extent, the politics have been inevitable due to the severe economic implications of the capacity shortages at Midway and O’Hare. Underlying much of the politics, however, is tension over who controls the region’s commercial airport system.

Metropolitan Chicago is one of only two regions in the United States with more than one major airport in which *all* of these airports are controlled by the municipal government of the central city. Both Midway and O’Hare are operated by the City of Chicago. All other urbanized regions with more than one major airport except Houston have at least one large airport that is controlled by a public entity, perhaps a county or airport authority, representing clusters of communities. Such is the case in metropolitan Boston, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco-Oakland, Philadelphia-Wilmington, and Washington, D.C. As Houston’s suburban population is less than a fourth of that in metropolitan Chicago, it is not difficult to understand why Chicago’s situation is ripe for city-suburb conflict.

The dominance of the city in airport management is partially attributable to the fact that, for most of aviation history, Chicago alone had the resources to build and operate airports. From 1930 to 1970, Chicago was more than 30 times the size of the largest suburb, giving it, almost by default, hegemony over the airport planning process. Even today, no other large metropolitan region in the country has such a wide proportional gap between the city and its largest suburb.

But a variety of communities which may today be considered suburbs of Chicago have had at least brief interludes with scheduled airline service since 1940 (Figure 1). United Airlines began serving Glenview’s Curtiss Field (later Glenview Naval Air Base) in 1938. These “Mainliner” flights operated to New York, with stops in Cleveland and Philadelphia. United apparently launched this service with hopes of helping the airfield’s bid to become a viable competitor to Municipal (Midway) Airport on the southwest side. Nevertheless, this service could not be sustained, and was abandoned in 1941.

When regional entities explored options for relieving Municipal in the early 1940s, a plethora of different sites were evaluated. The largely unincorporated parcel of land that was ultimately chosen, which was to become O’Hare, was situated between Bensenville, Elk Grove Village, and Rosemont, making it suburban in orientation. This property, used mostly for military and agricultural purposes during World War II, could only be brought under city control through a complex process that required annexing a thin sliver of land along the Northwest Express (today’s Kennedy).

The need to develop this new airport had become urgent by the early 1950s. Midway Airport was flooded with traffic, and larger and longer-range jets awaiting production, such as the Boeing 707, needed longer runways. O’Hare saw its first flights in 1955, but newly elected Mayor Richard J. Daley considered “finishing” the airport a top priority.

The relocation of flights from Midway to O’Hare dramatically changed the geography of the region’s air transport system. Those living in the south part of the region had to travel farther to reach the airport, which created heightened demand for service south and southeast of the city. By the early 1970s, airports in Gary, Michigan City, and Valparaiso, Ind., were served, or had been served, by small commercial airlines. The transferring of flights to O’Hare also increased the demand for an airport closer to downtown. Meigs Field, built on a lakefill near the south end of Grant Park, was particularly well-positioned to take advantage of this.

Daley believed that much more airport capacity would be needed than O’Hare could provide. Following his penchant for thinking big, he explored the possibility of an enormous airport in a fill in Lake Michigan. The mayor also contemplated an airport on the far south side in the Lake Calumet region. Neither moved beyond the discussion stage.

The burden of service would instead be borne almost entirely by Midway and O’Hare. By the late 1980s, scheduled service to Gary, Michigan, and Valparaiso—which had always been limited in scope—had come to an end. O’Hare was splitting from the seams amid a titanic struggle for dominance between American and United. Severe capacity problems prompted the late mayor’s son, Richard M. Daley, to support a coalition pushing an old idea, building a new airport at Lake Calumet.

Despite extensive planning, the effort to build the Lake Calumet airport ground to a halt. Daley abruptly dropped the idea due to concerns over who ultimately would control the facility as well as environmental issues and the need for the destruction of large numbers of homes and businesses. Fortunately, Midway had greater potential to absorb some of the demand than previously envisioned, giving the region time to assess its options on how to expand the airport system. The failure of the Lake Calumet effort, however, set in motion a contentious debate about whether to expand O’Hare or build a new airport in south-suburban Peotone that dominated the headlines. The city was adamant that funds from existing airports not be used to support the Peotone project. In 2001, it embarked on the massive O’Hare Modernization Program (OMP).



Despite the fact that air travel then fell onto hard times soon thereafter, largely due to dramatic increases in fuel prices, the city pushed ahead with the OMP. New competitors to the city’s airports also emerged as airline trips became longer and more oriented toward pleasure travel. South Bend enjoyed some success attracting travelers living in northwestern Indiana, while Milwaukee’s Mitchell Airport and Rockford Airport began attracting travelers north of the city. Particularly large numbers drove to Mitchell, which was favorably situated on the southern edge of the Milwaukee region, and a hotbed for low-fare airlines, including AirTran and Southwest.

For the promoters of Chicago’s existing airports, however, these distant facilities posed a less significant threat than the proposed South Suburban Airport in Peotone. But the Peotone proposal was embroiled in controversy amid opposition from people living near the proposed site and questions over political control. Despite a massive state-sponsored land-acquisition program, the effort to build this facility remained stuck in the proposal stage. Options for financing were limited, due in part to an intergovernmental agreement between Chicago and Gary that assures funds from Midway or O’Hare will only be spent to the benefit of airport development in those two cities.

The prospects for Gary’s airport, which remains in use, gradually grew as a result of the State of Indiana’s strengthened commitment to major improvements. But few expect that city’s airport to play a major role in scheduled passenger service anytime soon.

 **Summary of Scheduled Service at Outlying Airports**

The following sections review the evolution of scheduled service from Gary, Meigs Field, Michigan City, Valparaiso, and Winnetka since 1950.

 **Gary-Chicago Airport**

Gary-Chicago Airport is one of only three airports within the metropolitan region that has had scheduled passenger service provided by jet airplanes in the post-World War II era. (The others are Midway and O’Hare.) Formerly Gary Municipal Airport, this airfield has seen many carriers come and go, raising questions about its commercial viability. Recent developments, however, suggest it may soon be better positioned to serve a dramatically expanded role than it has in the past.

Since scheduled passenger service began at this airport in the early 1950s, it has been provided in two distinct phases, with the first emphasizing short-haul flights to the city’s major airports and various points in Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio (services primarily attractive to business travelers). The second phase featured more long-haul, albeit relatively infrequent, flights to pleasure markets in Florida, the Carolinas, and the American Southwest (services primarily attractive to pleasure seekers).

For more than two decades after its opening in the 1930s, Gary Municipal Airport had no scheduled service. In the early 1950s, however, Lake Central Airlines introduced DC-3 flights from Gary making multiple-stops between Midway Airport and Indianapolis, as well as Lima, Ohio. These flights made intermediate stops in Lafayette, and Kokomo, Ind., giving Gary direct service to five different airports.

**Midway**

**Gary**

**O’Hare**

**Lima**

**Indianapolis**

**Kokomo**

**Lafayette**

 ***Lake Central Airlines
 Chicago Helicopter Airways***

Figure 2: Air Service from Gary, Indiana, January 1959

The airport reached another milestone when Chicago Helicopter Airways began service in 1957 with three daily departures to Midway and O’Hare. These flights reached the south side airport in just 16 minutes and O’Hare 20 minutes later (for a total of 36 minutes), landing on Terminal 2’s rooftop. But Gary had trouble sustaining even this service. By the end of 1965, both the helicopter and Lake Central Service had ended. Another short-distance operator, Time Airlines, partially filled the void, making Gary a stop on its route from Chicago to Detroit and Port Huron, Mich., with intermediate stops in Benton Harbor and Ann Arbor. By 1972, however, Gary was again devoid of scheduled service.

For the next 17 years, Gary lacked any scheduled operators, save for the short-lived Crescent Helicopter service to O’Hare in the mid-1980s. The prospects for the airport were clouded by the plight of the city’s economy, with the collapse of its steel industry particularly harmful to its vitality and image. Making matters worse, the airport in Valparaiso gained traction and ultimately replaced Gary as northwestern Indiana’s most important commercial airport. The prospects for the airport remained poor until the municipal governments of Chicago and Gary signed the Chicago Gary Airport Compact in 1995. After the agreement was signed, the airport was renamed Gary-Chicago International Airport and investments were made in a new terminal, expanded parking lot, and other improvements.

As Gary’s airport started anew, the governmental authority created by this agreement offered significant financial incentives to entice prospective operators. Many observers considered these enticements, which included advertising support and free parking, as being part of a broader strategic move by Mayor Richard M. Daley to assure that Gary eclipsed Peotone as the most likely site for the anticipated “third major airport” in the region.

The momentum continued after Pan Am, a small startup jet operator (unrelated to the famous global carrier of the same name), launched service to Las Vegas in 1999.Within a few years, however, a troubling pattern of airlines starting and stopping had emerged and become somewhat of an embarrassment to the airport’s promoters. Pan Am suspended service in 2002. Hooter Air and Southeast Airlines filled the gap with service to the Carolinas and Florida, respectively, in 2004, yet both ceased to exist by 2006. Rumors that JetBlue would launch its Chicago service from Gary began to circulate that same year. Yet JetBlue chose instead to operate from O’Hare.

Optimism nonetheless rose almost feverishly when the first Skybus jet took off for Greensboro, N.C., in 2006. Soon, the ultra-discounter expanded to provide seasonal “scheduled charter” service to four warm-weather destinations, comprised of as many as five flights from the airport on certain days. The prospects briefly looked excellent, but Skybus entered bankruptcy and suspended service in 2008. And so another dry spell began.

This latest period in which scheduled service was unavailable lasted for nearly four years—until February 2012, when Allegiant Airlines began nonstop service to Orlando and St. Petersburg, Fla. At present, this airline operates two weekly flights to each destination (for a total of four weekly departures) from Gary, giving the airport a precarious foothold in the intercity passenger market.

Major improvements to the airport, however, are now underway. With the support of federal and state funding, the airport is expanding its perimeter and main runway to support increased cargo and passenger operations. Planning for an enlarged terminal is also underway.

 **Meigs Field**

Meigs Field left behind a legacy out of proportion to its size. Having had scheduled air service almost continuously for 40 years, despite having only a single runway that can handle only relatively small planes and helicopters, it met its demise in a controversial way. For Meigs, it came down to the relative merits of an airport versus an improved lakefront and museum complex. In the end, the City of Chicago wanted the latter.

Hopes for a bona-fide airport in downtown Chicago went unfulfilled for decades after air-mail service began on a landing strip in Grant Park in 1918. Both the city and state passed resolutions in the 1930s to create an airport near downtown, but this was not followed by action. Nor did the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition, which was held on Northerly Island (the same manmade peninsula later used for Meigs) elicit the breakthrough some anticipated, as the plan for the fair did not include an airport.

Congestion at Municipal (later Midway) Airport in the early 1940s, meanwhile, grew steadily worse and finally provided impetus for construction. Work on the modestly named “Northerly Island Landing Strip” began shortly after World War II. The new facility was opened for traffic in late 1946. After many improvements were made, the airport was dedicated in honor of Merrill C. Meigs, publisher of the *Chicago Herald and Examiner* and a strong supporter of aviation, in June 1950.

Scheduled service nonetheless did not immediately follow. When it first became available in 1957, it was limited to helicopter service to Midway and O’Hare. The provider, Chicago Helicopter Airways, shuttled passengers to and from the southwest-side airport in a mere 7 minutes and to O’Hare in another 11 minutes. Within three years, the company was operating 15 daily flights to both Midway and O’Hare.

**Peoria**

**Springfield**

**Carbondale**

**O’Hare**

**Midway**

**Benton Harbor**

**Meigs Field**

 ***Air Illinois
 Chicago Helicopter Airways***

 ***Air Michigan***

Figure 3: Air Service from Meig Field, early 1970s

“Fixed wing” service, however, did not materialize until after the city replaced its small wooden terminal with a modern glass and steel structure in 1961. This attractive facility also had office space, ticket counters, and a spacious waiting area with splendid views of the lake. These investments soon paid off: by the mid-1960s, Commuter Airlines operated several weekday flights to Springfield, Ill., a service that appeared poised for expansion as lobbyists, legislators, and businessmen took delight in the ease of day trips, even half-day trips, to the state capital. Soon, the small company was operating more than two dozen flights a day from Meigs, providing service to Cleveland, Detroit (City Airport), Madison, Wis., and Moline and Peoria, Ill., albeit mostly with planes with eight or fewer seats for passengers.

Commuter Airlines soon abandoned service, but by the early 1970s, two others, Hub Airlines, which flew to Fort Wayne, Ind., Springfield, and Detroit City Airport, and Air Michigan, which flew to Benton Harbor, Mich., had taken its place. The Air Michigan service gave travelers the ability to avoid the circuitous and stressful drive around the south end of Lake Michigan. Both airlines soon dropped their service, but Air Illinois partially filled the void with service to Peoria and Springfield, as well as one-stop service to Carbondale.

The peak of scheduled service to downstate cities, however, was yet to come. By early 1972, Air Illinois had expanded from five to eight trips to Springfield each weekday. Ozark Airlines grew concerned that this service was encroaching on its O’Hare business and, in March 1972, introduced nine weekday roundtrips on this same route. This gave Springfield-bound passengers a choice of *17* weekday arrivals and departures, and expanded weekend service as well. The future seemed to belong to Ozark, which was the larger and better known carrier. Ozark advertised having a departure every 90 minutes.

Such extensive service, however, could not be sustained as oil prices rose and the economy weakened. In a matter of months, the number of roundtrips plummeted to five. Ozark lasted less than a year before suspending all of its Meigs-Springfield flights. In late 1973 Air Illinois reduced its schedule to five weekday roundtrips but at the same time introduced 48-seat HS 748 aircraft that reduced flight time from one hour to 45 minutes. Larger and far more comfortable than the “puddle jumpers” they replaced, these planes raised hopes that a more diverse clientele would start to use the service.

But even the pared-down schedule could not be consistently sustained. Helicopter service was suspended in 1970, resumed in 1971, and then disappeared for good by America’s bicentennial year. Then, on October 11, 1983, an Air Illinois flight that originated at Meigs crashed near Pinckneyville, Ill., on its way to Carbondale. The accident killed all 10 on board. After the federal government grounded the airline, Air Illinois resumed service to Springfield the following year. The carrier limped along and was later replaced with Great Lakes Aviation, which concentrated on the Springfield route.

Efforts to close the airport intensified after its 50-year lease from the Chicago Park District expired in 1996. The remaining service hobbled along after the city announced plans to close Meigs in late 2001 to support an ambitious lakefront improvement project that included creating the Museum Campus. In the meantime, the city greatly increased the cost of using Meigs. As the shutdown, in August 2001, loomed Great Lakes suspended its flights, citing its inability to compete with new service set to begin from Midway.

The future of the airport nonetheless brightened later that year when Mayor Richard M. Daley announced a compromise with the state that would allow the airport to remain open for another 25 years. But in his view, the conditions upon which the deal rested were not met. On March 31, 2003, in the middle of the night, he had the runway abruptly removed. Many Chicagoans felt the mayor neglected to obtain the necessary approvals and was “going too far” to achieve his lakefront goals.

Grassroots efforts to reopen the airport, however, proved no match against the powerful city. The FAA required the city to pay a fine to recover the federal funds that had helped improve the airport, but Meigs was gone forever. The terminal building was preserved and transformed into a non-transportation civic amenity supporting the lakefront park created on the site.

**Phillips Field, Michigan City**

The airport that businessman Joe Phillips opened in the 1940s still had just a grass runway into the early 1950s and seemed to have little potential for scheduled service. The gradual relocation of flights from Midway to O’Hare starting in the mid-1950s, however, created a new opportunity. Residents now faced the prospect of a more than 80-mile trip to reach Chicago’s most important airport.

After making improvements to his airport, Phillips created an airline bearing his name that launched four weekday flights to Chicago and back using small Piper propeller-powered planes having eight or fewer seats in 1969. These nonstop flights made the trip to O’Hare in just 30 minutes.

Little is known about the financial performance of Phillips Airlines, but patronage appears to have been light. Numerous flights likely left Michigan City without any paying customers. In 1971, the airline consolidated its Michigan City flight to O’Hare with those from Valparaiso. This quick stop at the county seat added 10 minutes to the O’Hare trip.

**O’Hare**

**Michigan City**

**Valparaiso**

Figure 4: Air Service to Michigan City, Indiana, January 1972

Competition escalated after motor coach service between Michigan City and O’Hare was introduced by Tri-State Coach Lines in 1973. A popular service that continues today under the Coach USA banner, it operated from a terminal several miles from the airfield. In 1977, Phillips Airlines added yet another stop to its route, in nearby LaPorte, adding 10 more minutes to the journey.

The end came before late 1986, when Phillips Airlines suspended all of its service. The Michigan City municipal government purchased Phillips Field that year and transformed it into a public airport. The small Phillips Airlines terminal building was torn down and replaced with a modern terminal used by private aviation companies.

**Valparaiso (Porter County) Airport**

Valparaiso is the only “suburban” community in the Chicago region that once had air service to another metropolitan area in the post-World War II era. For a relatively brief period in the early 1980s, it had service to both O’Hare and Indianapolis.

After Porter County Regional Airport was founded in 1949, it lacked scheduled service for 20 years. A variety of factors, however, gradually stimulated demand. The relocation of flights from Midway to O’Hare in the late 1950s made flying less convenient. Amid the devastating decline of Gary, thousands of middle- and upper- income residents moved to this community’s vicinity. By the mid-1960s, air-taxi service to O’Hare was an appealing option.

In 1969, Phillips Airlines, the Michigan City, Ind.-based operator described earlier, launched service to O’Hare, initially with four daily roundtrips. These flights, requiring a 30-minute leg to reach O’Hare, were initially operated by small propeller-powered Piper planes. Flights departed from a modest terminal building built of brick and consisting of little more than a small waiting room and ticket counter. In 1971, the flights into Valparaiso were extended to Michigan City. Later, a stop in LaPorte, Ind., was added to the northward segment.

Valparaiso’s air service rose to its zenith in 1979 when a second carrier, Neimeyer Aviation, began operating weekday roundtrips from Indianapolis. This flight touched down in Kentland, Ind., before reaching Valparaiso, giving the city direct service to five communities, although two—LaPorte and Michigan City—were less than 30 miles away, making such service of little value to airline passengers.

**Kentland**



**LaPorte**



**Michigan City**

**Indianapolis**

**O’Hare**

**Valparaiso**

 ***Phillips Airlines
 Neimeyer Avaition***

Figure 5: Air Service from Valparaiso, Indiana, January 1980

All of these services, however, were soon to disappear. Airline travelers grew more accustomed to driving to O’Hare, and competition from Tri-State Coach Lines, which began serving Valparaiso, took its toll. The flights to Indianapolis were dropped in 1980, and Phillips Airlines had suspended operations by 1986, marking the end of Valparaiso’s scheduled operations.

Valparaiso, which had a population of only about 22,000 at the time, was in the midst of a difficult transition that would eventually leave it without any scheduled intercity service. As recently as the late 1960s, the city had had three passenger railroads—the Grand Truck, Nickel Plate lines, and Pennsylvania Railroad—as well as Greyhound bus service. By the late 1980s, only Amtrak and Greyhound remained, and by the mid-1990s, both were gone as well. This gives Valparaiso the distinction of being the only community in the metropolitan Chicago region to have lost all its long-distance service on three different modes—air, bus, and rail.

The old terminal building was razed in 1997 to make room for a larger airport terminal building, which still stands. Rarely is the return of scheduled air service seriously contemplated today, in part due to the success of South Bend Regional Airport, which is about 50 miles away. Private aviation service at the airfield, however, remains robust.

**Winnetka Heliport**

Winnetka Heliport was the only transportation facility in the Chicago region’s history to serve exclusively as a heliport. This small airfield offered an expedient means of reaching Midway and O’Hare Airports, between 1958 and the early 1970s.

When Chicago Helicopter Airways (CHA) inaugurated service on November 12, 1956, its 12-passenger S-58C helicopters flew only between Midway and O’Hare. Significant expansion, however, was soon underway, starting with service to close-in Meigs Field in 1957, followed by service to north-suburban Winnetka and Gary, Ind., the following year. Fares for travel between Winnetka and O’Hare were just $5 each way, and trips to Midway were just $2 more. First-class passengers making connections to international flights operated by Pan Am Airlines and other carriers often could use the service at no additional cost through a special ticketing arrangement.

**Winnetka**

Figure 6: Air Service to Winnetka, Illinois, January 1959

***All routes by Chicago Helicopter Airways***

**O’Hare**

**Midway**

Chicago Helicopter’s terminal at 130 Willow Road may have been modest in size, but it included a ticket counter, small waiting room, concrete tarmac, and a parking lot. A specially-built facility situated near the northwest corner of Willow and Hibbard Roads in Winnetka, the heliport was buffered by undeveloped land that mitigated the noise generated by takeoffs and landings.

The difficulty of driving to O’Hare appeared to work to the service’s advantage. Winnetka may be a mere 13 miles “as the crow flies” from the airport, but it lacked a direct expressway route, making driving distances closer to 20 miles and travel times upwards of 40 minutes. With flights whisking passengers to O’Hare in just nine minutes, and the landing pad centrally located on the rooftop of Terminal 3, traveling by helicopter could easily shave 40 minutes off of an out-of-town trip. An even bigger time savings was enjoyed by those flying from Midway, which was hard to reach by car but just 22 minutes by helicopter from Winnetka.

Advertisements placed by the company heralded the heliport’s convenience for those living in Lake Forest, Highland Park, and Northbrook as well as Winnetka—bedroom communities with large numbers of Loop executives who frequently took to the skies. The carrier’s four daily roundtrip flights were timed to serve these travelers. The first flight departed at 7 a.m., and the last one returned at 8:07 p.m., making day trips to New York and other East Coast business centers feasible.

Sadly, tragedy loomed on the horizon. Flight 698 from Midway to O’Hare crashed in Forest Park, Ill., in July 1960, killing all 11 passengers and both crew members on board—the worst accident in the history of scheduled helicopter passenger service at the time. Although this doomed trip did not originate or terminate in Winnetka, the accident irrevocably hurt the carrier’s image and heightened concerns over the safety of helicopter travel in general. Struggling to diversify its revenues, the company began offering express shipment (time-sensitive cargo) service in 1962, but it never fully recovered from the accident and only briefly served Winnetka afterwards.

The last of Chicago Helicopter’s service—the Meigs-Midway-O’Hare route—was cancelled in 1975. Hardly a trace of the Winnetka Heliport remains today. The terminal building was razed and the concrete apron was completely removed.

**Conclusion**

Among the five outlying communities that had scheduled air service since the start of World War II, only Gary—which today has a mere four weekly departures —appears to have the potential to play a significant role in scheduled passenger service. Even its role is uncertain.

As noted on the preceding pages, Gary, Michigan City, and Valparaiso all suffered from the following factors:

- The enormous scale of Midway and O’Hare made it difficult for them to compete with Chicago’s airports. Midway’s emergence as a hub for low-cost operators compounded this problem.

-The relatively small amount of business traffic in the southern part of the region, particularly after the collapse of the steel industry in Gary in the late 1970s, reduced the viability of what little service was available at the time.

- The deregulation of the airlines in 1978, as well as the rise in jet fuel prices spelled doom for many “air taxi services” nationwide, thus undercutting an important role for these airports. No longer were major airlines compelled to pro-rate their revenues with small airlines providing short-haul feeder service.

- The success of motor-coach service from these communities to Midway and O’Hare also diminished demand for scheduled flights.

Meigs Field also suffered from several of the above factors and had the additional problem of having a short runway and parking that prevented jet operations.

As a result of these and other problems, scheduled service never expanded much beyond that at Midway and O’Hare. The region’s airports never developed in a manner similar to metropolitan Los Angeles, which has six airports with extensive scheduled service, or Greater New York, which has five.

Arrangement of airports with scheduled service is not likely to appreciably change over the next decade. Instead, the Chicago region appears likely to continue to follow a pattern akin to Boston, which opted to expand its primary airport (Logan) in the wake of failed efforts to build an entirely new airport on the periphery of the metropolitan region. Moreover, diversion to airports outside of the Chicago metropolitan region is likely to continue in a manner similar to that in Boston. In the Boston region, airports in Manchester, N.H., and Providence, R. I., are siphoning away much suburban-oriented traffic. In metropolitan Chicago, it is Mitchell Airport in Milwaukee and the Chicago-Rockford airport that have become most significant.

Mitchell is a particularly notable O’Hare challenger, in part due to the services provided by AirTran and Southwest Airlines. The fare difference is reason enough for many passengers, particularly among those living in the north part of the metropolitan region, to make the drive. Air-rail connections via Amtrak also hold promise at Mitchell, but remain only a minor factor on the account of the limited frequency. More trains and additional service late in the evening will likely be necessary for such transfers to rise to significant levels.

The long distances that separate many households and businesses from Midway and O’Hare, as well as the specter of worsening traffic congestion, nevertheless assure that the desire to build a “third major” airport in the region will remain strong. The OMP coupled with major investments at Midway have done little to lessen these desires. Although the O’Hare project appears poised to give the region enough capacity to handle the growth in traffic for at least a decade, that capacity will eventually be exhausted again, and the debate will start anew. The battle over airports indeed appears destined to continue for years to come.

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