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## Transportation: Open Gates

By Art Levy - 5/16/2011

**Joe Lopano took over as CEO** of Tampa International Airport in January with a very specific dictate: Attract international flights.

**How he plans to boost international traffic:** "The way that we are approaching it now is very fact-based and analytical. We used a consultant to go out and study the markets and find out where the passenger flows are sufficient to sustain a flight and what markets those would be. And then we take another look and see what airlines would be interested in flying to those markets and are those airlines ordering aircraft and will they have the capacity coming on line to enter a new market. We only go after airlines when we know the flight could be profitable and sustainable because airlines are like any other business. They don't do things that don't earn profits."

**"The impact is estimated to be \$153 million each year, just for one wide-body flight from Europe a day. It means roughly 1,300 new jobs."**

— Joe Lopano, CEO,  
Tampa International Airport  
[Photo: Bryan Thomas/St.Petersburg Times]

Potential targets: "We're waiting for the results of the study, but my gut tells me that we can certainly sustain more service to Europe, based on the number of European visitors we have, plus the numbers of Europeans who own property in our region. I think we can also sustain new service to the West Coast domestically, and we're looking at some opportunities in Central America as well."

New money: "I just got the results of the economic impact of one additional non-stop flight, as an example, from Europe. The impact is estimated to be \$153 million each year, just for one wide-body flight from Europe a day. It means roughly 1,300 new jobs. Just to sort of translate that into tangible terms: On Sunday, a flight does not operate from Europe. Monday, this new flight lands. What happens that's different? Well, there are 200 new people on the flight, and they all have euros in their pockets, and they all go stay in our hotels, and they take our taxis, and they all go to our restaurants and tip our servers. Everyone along the way makes money on a flight that on Sunday was in Europe. On Monday, that money is in Tampa. And then on Tuesday, another 200 people arrive with money that used to be in Europe. That's why international flights matter."

In March, the airport was granted the go-ahead to host non-stop flights to and from Cuba. The Cuba flights won't have much of an economic impact, but Lopano thinks they should help the airport lure other foreign flights.

"It illustrates the fact that Tampa Bay is an international community, and that's an image that we need to continue to foster, not only here in this country but overseas as well."

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