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New report: Punta Gorda airport pumps \$353.2 million into SW Florida economy

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Punta Gorda Airport has more than cheap flights.

It's a proven player in Southwest Florida's economy, pumping more than \$353 million into the area each year, according to a new study made public today.

To be sure, the Charlotte County airport has drawn notice for its exponential passenger growth over the past four years — thanks chiefly to Allegiant Air.

But airport Executive Director James Parish added that, "As a landlord, land developer and general aviation airport, we are tightly interconnected with the local economy."

On Thursday, Charlotte County Airport Authority's board got its first look at results from the study it commissioned from Indiana-based Volaire Aviation Consulting.

The [study report](#) estimates that, regionally, the airport accounts for:

- \$353.2 million in annual economic output;
- 3,618 full-time equivalent jobs, with \$110.4 million in annual payroll;
- \$24.8 million generated annually through state and local taxes; and
- \$28.5 million in annual federal taxes.

For Charlotte County alone, the report puts the estimated annual economic impact at \$208.3 million.

Parish called the study findings "conservative. We are happy with the numbers, and aren't surprised."

He hopes the findings will come to good use "when there's a developer looking to do something" in the vicinity of the airport.

Punta Gorda Airport served more than 1.1 million passengers in 2016, for a nearly 34 percent increase over 2015.

Although it's part of Lee County, the city of Cape Coral is a logical beneficiary of the airport's growth.

"It's a very easy trip up Burnt Store Road," Parish noted.

Roughly 10 Cape Coral businesses are or have been airport tenants in recent years, according to airport authority records.

The city of Cape Coral Economic Development advertises in the airport's Bailey Terminal.

And, the Punta Gorda Airport-based chapters of the Experimental Aircraft Association and the EAA Warbirds include members who are Cape Coral residents.

[Punta Gorda Airport pulls in people, dollars for SWFL](#)

On Tuesday, Charlotte's airport authority announced that Punta Gorda served more than 120,700 passengers in April – for a year-over-year increase topping 23 percent. April was the 42nd consecutive month for increased passenger traffic.

Study findings show that any new air service at Punta Gorda Airport will bring substantial economic impact.

For the region, a new route would bring 105 jobs and a \$10.8 million annual economic output, according to the study.

The port authority-commissioned study shows significantly higher economic impacts than a report the Florida Department of Transportation issued in 2014 as part of its Florida Statewide Aviation Economic Impact Study.

That FDOT report included 2012 data, and put total economic output for Punta Gorda Airport at a bit over \$219.9 million.

[Frontier Airlines starts service to Punta Gorda Airport](#)

Much of Allegiant's and all of Frontier Airlines' local service began after the report was released.

The next FDOT economic impact study for airports is scheduled for January of next year.

Because this isn't an airport with a lot of daily commercial service, most of the passengers are leisure travelers, not people on business trips.

It isn't unusual for a travel party to fly into Punta Gorda, and then leave Florida via Orlando Sanford International Airport.

Said Parish: "They fly here to see Grandma and Grandpa in Punta Gorda, hit Disney World for a couple of days, and then head home."