US Airways Airplanes Michael Plasmeier

Over the last 10 years, US Airways has refocused on flying larger aircrafts longer distances, as the industry faced intensive pressure from LCCs and high fuel costs. Were as in 2000, US Airways had 348 small narrowbody planes, US Airways reduced that number by 20% in 2009 to 255. In 2000, US Airways had 34 large narrowbodies, while in 2009 US Airways had more than doubled the number of large narrowbodies that it operated to 76. The growth of large narrowbody was matched and exceded by American, Continental, and Delta. United meanwhile kept the number of it large narrowbody airplanes fairly constant at 97 for the entire decade. As much of the industry was downsizing its widebody fleet, US Airways grew its slightly from 15 to 21 widebody aircrafts. The average number of seats on a US Airways airplane increased 14% over the decade from 138 seats to 158 seats. However, as US Airways was increasing the size of its airplanes it was also cutting fuel consumption per block hour from 1,062 gallons per block hour to 879 gallons, a 17% decrease. However, US Airways continues to hold the record of having the lowest fuel consumption per block hour, less than a third of some other network legacy carriers. This is likely due to US Airway’s smaller aircraft, which have lower fuel consumptions per hour each one of them is flying, but is less efficent than larger airplanes.

In recent years, US Airways added international service. It currently serves about 11 destinations in Europe and 15 in the Caribbean from Philadelphia.[[1]](#footnote-1) These flights require larger aircraft and are longer, increasing stage length. Extending flight times should also decrease unit costs slightly due to longer flights.

Fuel costs were the largest story in the past decade. Yearly fuel costs reached their maximum in 2008 at $2,882 per flight hour, while those costs were only $848 6 years before. US Airways also faced very unstable costs for labor. During the decade pilot costs per block hour doubled from 2002 to 2005. Maintance costs per airborne hour, however, hit a low point in 2005, only to double by 2009. Aircraft ownership per aircraft ranged by 25% over the decade, increasing in the later half of the decade as US Airways brought America West into the equation. Unit costs (total fleet costs per ASM) increased from 5.942 at US Airways to 6.274 cents over the decade at the combined airline.

US Airways’ average stage length continues to be the lowest in the industry. In 2000, an average US Airways flight only covered 639 miles vs the network carrier industry average of 967 miles. Average stage length across the industry increased steadily over the decade by about 40-60 miles per year. US Airways average stage length increased signficantly by 143 miles when US Airways merged with America West. However, US Airways continues to cover the shortest distance of any network legacy airline with 972 miles. Nevertheless, US Airways managed to increase its average stage length by 50% over the decade. Over the decade the industry began to increasing rely on third party contract airlines to conduct shorter flights. For example, US Airways has 9 regional partners today.[[2]](#footnote-2) These flights are not reported in these numbers.

Departures per aircraft per day fell 30% at the combined airline in 2009 vs. US Airways before the merger in 2000. Adding America West’s 2000 data only leads to a 26% drop in departures per aircraft per day. Both changes, however, were larger than the industry average of 20% over the decade. This trend was due to the airlines extending flight time to serve destinations further and further away over the decade.

The combined airborne hours of US Airways and America West declined by 37% over the decade from 1,187,426 US Airways hours and 436,257 America West hours to 1,027,197 hours for the combined airline. The combined US Airways and America West airlines flew less hours than just US Airways did only 9 years before. Immeditatly after 9/11, US Airways cut airborn hours sharply by 21%, while America West actually increased airborne hours slightly from 2001 to 2002. US Airways was never able to increase hours back to historical numbers. US Airways and America West also shed flights when they merged, flying 13% less hours in the first year combined data was reported vs the sum of each airline’s data the year before.

All data is from the MIT Airline Data Project unless otherwise noted. Downloaded 10/20/2010

1. US Airways Route Map on their website [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. US Airways website [↑](#footnote-ref-2)