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NEWS RELEASE

DRO passenger traffic down in 2020 but recovery outpaces U.S. average

Durango, CO: The number of passengers traveling through the Durango-La Plata County Airport (DRO) decreased 49% in 2020, but the airport has recovered faster from the impacts of COVID-19 than many airports in the U.S., based on national trends.

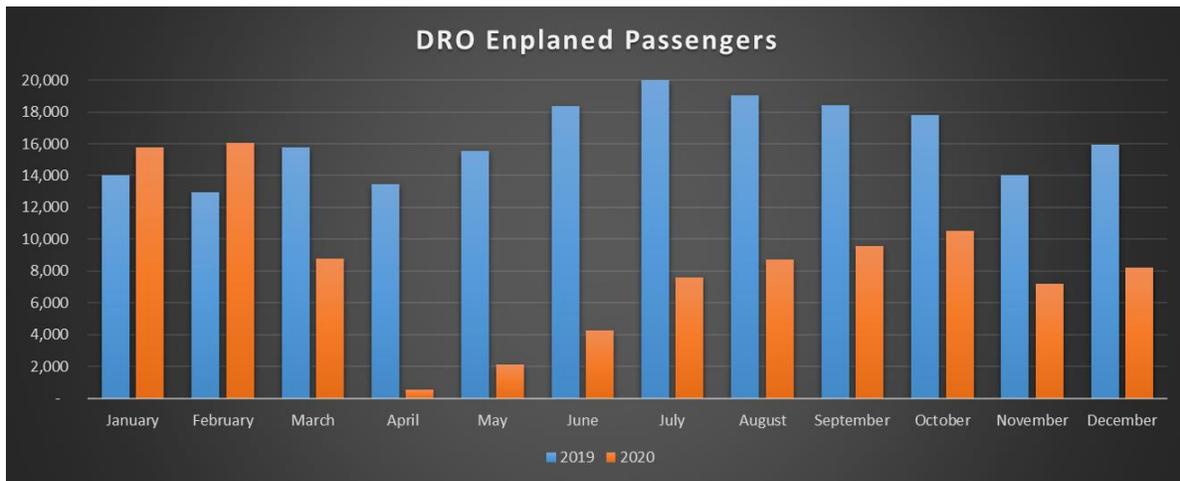
The airport's busiest year on record was 2019, when 390,506 people used DRO. The significant decline in passenger traffic in 2020, to 197,886 passengers, is attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic and its sweeping impacts on the airline industry. Passenger traffic across the U.S. in 2020 was down 61% from the previous year, according to the Transportation Security Administration.

"The pandemic has caused a significant reset for airports and airlines worldwide," said Aviation Director Tony Vicari. "At DRO we continue to place our focus on public and employee health while also meeting the needs of travelers arriving to and departing from Durango and the Four Corners."

Airline passenger traffic experienced unprecedented declines at the onset of the pandemic. Passenger activity at DRO in April was a mere 5% of pre-pandemic levels, marking the low point for air travel demand. In the following summer and spring months, traffic recovery at DRO steadily progressed, and by October traffic was 59% of pre-pandemic levels. Traffic during November and December settled back to 51% of pre-pandemic levels as concerns rose about public health conditions both locally and nationally.

Overall passenger traffic recovery at DRO has significantly outpaced the national average since July, routinely running 15 to 20 percentage points above the domestic average for the duration of the year. The stronger recovery in southwest Colorado may be attributed to consistent airline schedules, regional economic resiliency, ongoing recreation/outdoor appeal to visitors, and a focus on domestic travel during the pandemic.

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While commercial airline passenger traffic numbers decreased sharply in 2020, DRO remained open throughout the pandemic to support numerous critical services including:

- Commercial airline traffic for those with travel needs consistent with current public health guidance
- Emergency medical flights
- Air freight flights
- US Forest Service air tanker base
- Military flights
- General aviation activity

Some segments of airport activity experienced lesser impacts from the pandemic. Air freight activity was up 3% in 2020, rental car gross revenues were down only 19% for the year, and non-airline aviation fuel sales were up 26%.

Despite the challenging year, DRO staff were able to fully renovate five public restrooms, complete an update to the Terminal Area Development Plan, upgrade the airport water treatment system, and complete a \$3 million reconstruction of the airport’s commercial aircraft parking apron.

A Look at 2021

While there are many continuing challenges, Vicari says there are things to be optimistic about in 2021.

“American Airlines and United Airlines have restored total seat capacity to approximately 70% of pre-pandemic levels, showing confidence in the strength of the Durango market,” he said. “Daily nonstop flights to Dallas, Denver, and Phoenix have remained uninterrupted throughout the pandemic, and no changes are anticipated on any of these three routes.”

The proportionately strong recovery at DRO will also aid in ongoing discussions with the airlines about restoration of seasonal service to Chicago, Houston, and Los Angeles, which were last served in 2019.

Air freight, general aviation activity and rental car concessions continue to perform strongly, bringing operational and financial stability to the airport.

The airport continues to strategically invest in its facilities. This year's projects include design and engineering work for a planned 2022 rehabilitation of the airport runway, airport wastewater system upgrades, and terminal plumbing upgrades.

"As the pandemic continues to evolve, we are confident in the resilience of our regional economy and of the enduring demand for air service in southwest Colorado," Vicari said. "As passengers regain the confidence to travel, we will be ready to help them safely reconnect with the world. Long-term, DRO remains well-positioned to serve the aviation needs of our community."

About Durango-La Plata County Airport

Durango-La Plata County Airport (DRO) is the primary regional airport for Southwest Colorado, Northwest New Mexico, and the entire Four Corners region. DRO welcomed over 390,000 passengers in 2019 and contributes over \$290 million annually to the regional economy. DRO is served by two of the four largest U.S. airlines (American and United), offering daily nonstop routes to Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW), Denver (DEN), and Phoenix (PHX).

DRO operates as an enterprise fund of the city of Durango and generates self-sustaining revenue from airport tenants and users in the form of airline rent and landing fees, terminal concessions, ground leases, and parking fees. The airport does not receive any local tax funding.

Learn more about the Durango-La Plata County Airport at [FlyDurango.com](https://www.flydurango.com). Follow us on social media at twitter.com/DROAirport and facebook.com/DROAirport

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