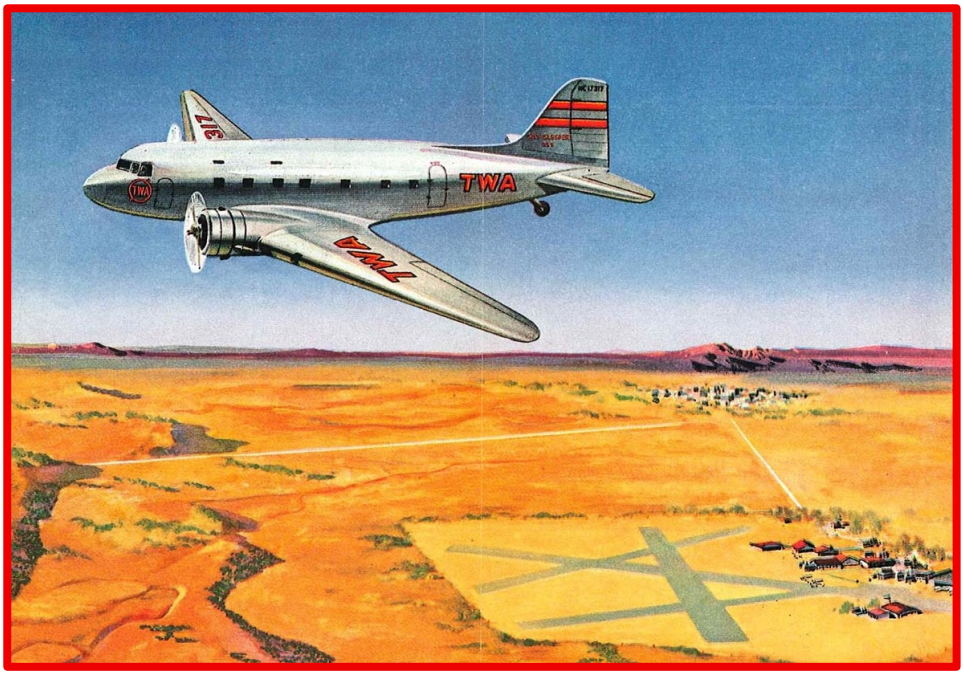
ERNEST A. LOVE FIELD

PRESCOTT REGIONAL AIRPORT

Airline Service



1939 TWA timetable art

Beginning as early as the mid-1920s, a variety of companies and individuals announced plans to provide airline service to Prescott. There were to be Prescott-based sightseeing airlines utilizing the big trimotor Fokker and Ford transports of the day, as well as airlines connecting Prescott with a variety of destinations – Phoenix, Kingman, the Grand Canyon and others. In June 1926, the *Prescott Evening Courier* published an elaborately altered photo of a Fokker airliner with "Arizona" and "Grand Canyon Airway" graphics added to the airplane's fuselage. Nationwide, this activity reached a fever pitch in the months following Lindbergh's 1927 transatlantic flight. In Arizona, it seemed like someone was promoting another new "airline" every few weeks. Some of these efforts were sincere, if not impractical and under-capitalized. Some were simply wishful thinking. A few were outright frauds – attempts to fleece unsophisticated investors in much the same way that bogus railroad, mining and bank stocks had been promoted in previous decades. Most of the early airline schemes that were pitched in Arizona during the 1920s were of the former type. Very few ever actually operated scheduled service.

By the end of 1927, Jack Frye's Aero Corporation of California had begun to build its passenger service from Los Angeles to Phoenix and Tucson. As Standard Air Lines, the company later extended the route to Douglas, El Paso and finally Dallas. By the middle of 1929, Western Air Express and Transcontinental Air Transport were both flying across Northern Arizona.

The awarding of transcontinental Air Mail contracts by the Post Office Department in 1930 was the result of an unexpected and somewhat convoluted game of musical chairs. There were winners and losers. Arguably, the strongest and most established carriers now operated the three transcontinental routes, two of which crossed Arizona. That left only intrastate routes for the Arizona operators that still aspired to run an airline. With established interstate airlines operating across northern and southern Arizona, small operators were quick to recognize that a north-south route linking the two transcontinental airways might be profitable. There were many variations of this proposed north-south intrastate route, but almost all of them included a stop at Prescott.

Scenic Airways, best known for pioneering Grand Canyon tour flights and building Sky Harbor Airport in Phoenix, outlined plans to add Prescott to its ambitious Arizona route system in the late 1920s. However, there is no evidence that scheduled service to Prescott was ever initiated, and although Scenic's Ford Tri-Motors often landed at Ernest A. Love Field, these flights were generally charters or sightseeing excursions.

The June 11, 1928, issue of *Aviation* magazine included a single paragraph announcing that Apache Air Lines of Phoenix had just purchased a Brown-Mercury airplane and was "operating a daily passenger service between Phoenix and Prescott." No further information about this venture has been located and it is almost certain that no such schedule actually materialized. Through the years, there have been least four different entities in Arizona that organized under variations of the name "Apache Airlines," but very little documentation has been found regarding this particular company.

Ralph G. Vaughan operated what is believed to be the third incarnation of Apache Airlines, providing regular scheduled passenger service between Globe-Miami and Phoenix in 1929-31. This was a well-managed, going concern utilizing Vaughan's flagship, a Kreutzer K-3 tri-motor (an airplane that, coincidentally, was derived from the Brown-Mercury plane mentioned above). Vaughan was a frequent visitor to Prescott and he had solid plans to extend his airline from Phoenix to Prescott. However, just as this service seemed imminent, the Depression forced Apache Airlines to call it quits.

The table on the following page lists the companies that are known to have proposed airline service to Prescott prior to World War II. The Great Depression caused most of these companies to evaporate, dashing Prescott's early hopes for airline service. To date, no documentation or other evidence has been found to confirm that regular scheduled airline service was extended to Prescott during the 1920s or 1930s. There were several Phoenix-based firms that provided air transportation to Prescott, some with words like "air lines" or "airways" in their names, but these were actually small charter operators that did not maintain a schedule.

Airline Dreams

Pre-World War II Airline Service Proposals

This list includes only those airline companies that specifically proposed scheduled service to Prescott. Some of these were composed of little more than company officers, good intentions and wishful thinking. A few, however, were well-capitalized going concerns.

No evidence has yet been found to confirm that *scheduled* service was ever operated at Prescott prior to 1946. Some companies with names that included the words airline, air service or airways would occasionally announce that they were providing service to Prescott, but these were essentially on-demand charters, not regularly-scheduled flights.

The dates are the approximate month and year that the intention to provide service was first reported. Company names in bold type were true airlines that actually provided scheduled service to points in Arizona. Although they proposed scheduled service to Prescott, there is currently no evidence that it commenced.

Only two of these companies were still operating in 1933 and only one (TWA) was operating in 1940.

DATE	NAME (or dba)	PRINCIPAL(S)
1926 (May)	proposed Grand Canyon airline	Robert "Bob" Hausler, Frank Clarke
1928 (Apr)	Apache Aircraft Corporation (aka Apache Air Lines)	E. H. Jolley, S. T. Nelson, Thomas Woodman, G. V. Hays, M. Van Horst
1928 (Apr)	**Aero Corporation of California / Standard Airlines**	Jack Frye, Paul E. Richter, Walter Hamilton
1928 (Apr) > 1929 >	**Scenic Airways**	J. Parker Van Zandt, G. Hall Roosevelt, William B. Stout et al.
1928 (May)	Aero Corporation of Arizona	T. L. Weatherford, Herb R. Askins, R. E. "Kern" Warren, Charles Goldtrap
1928 (Sep)	Southwest Air Service	Del Jones, C. B. Cosgrove, H. W. Durham
1929 (Jun)	Arizona Flying Service	E. R. Quintal, H. E. Frederickson, G. C. Quick
1929 (Jul)	Copper State Airways	John H. Harrison, Manuel Gutierrez, Norman Wykoff
1929 (Jul)	All-American Airways (aka Aero Corporation of America)	William J. Touhey, John A. Wheeler
1929 (Jul)	Arizona Aero Corporation	Leslie P. Arnold, D. E. Jones, William Black, D. E. Ellis
1929 (Oct)	Union Air Lines	Leslie P. Arnold et al. (reportedly a merger of Southwest, Copper State and Aero Corporation of Arizona)
1930 (Jun)	**Apache Airlines**	Ralph G. Vaughan
1932 (Jan) > 1936-37	**Grand Canyon Airlines**	Jack Thornburg, Glover E. "Roxy" Ruckstell
1938	**Transcontinental & Western Air (TWA)**	Jack Frye, Paul E. Richter, F. G. Wilson, L. G. Fritz

POSTWAR

The civilian air travel restrictions necessitated by World War II resulted in enormous pent-up demand for airline service. When hostilities ended, the major established air carriers wasted no time in expanding their pre-war route systems. In addition, the availability of inexpensive military surplus transport aircraft, along with plenty of trained ex-servicemen to fly them, resulted in a flock of new intrastate and regional airlines. This enabled Prescott and hundreds of other smaller cities to finally take their places on the nation's airline route maps.

Non-Scheduled Airlines ("Nonskeds")

Arizona Airways, Trans World Airlines (TWA), and Bonanza Air Lines all pioneered scheduled passenger service to Prescott. There were also several non-scheduled "irregular service carriers" that played a sketchy role in providing airline service at Prescott from 1946 into the 1950s. Like the trunk and feeder airlines, these companies sought to capitalize on the availability of inexpensive war surplus transport planes and trained pilots. Under the existing federal regulations (technically, an exemption in the 1938 Civil Aviation Act), they were allowed to conduct on-demand charter operations – passengers and freight – as well as government contract flights. Eventually, a few of these companies received federal authority for scheduled cargo flights. However, none of these "nonskeds" were certificated by the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) for regular scheduled passenger flights between city pairs. Nevertheless, some operated in regulatory gray areas or by subterfuge – or even in open defiance of the air carrier regulations.

Prescott's new postwar position on Green Civil Airway No. 4, combined with the airport manager's entrepreneurial approach to fuel sales, made it a popular refueling point for the nonskeds. According to local news reports, Douglas DC-3's operated by Viking Air Transport landed at Ernest A. Love Field nearly every night, often picking up fare-paying passengers and taking them to points east. A number of other nonskeds are known to have operated similarly at Prescott. Viking was a busy postwar charter and contract operator, but it did not have a CAB certificate. Many of the non-scheduled airline flights through Prescott were operated under various U.S. Government civil and military contracts, including a route between San Francisco and Mexico. Seats on these flights were not available to fare-paying passengers. However, there is evidence that for brief and varied periods, Viking and/or other nonskeds may have operated regular scheduled flights through Prescott, with tickets available by advance purchase through supposedly independent travel agencies. In any case, amidst congressional hearings and protracted legal proceedings, in the mid-1950s the CAB began the process of reining in those non-scheduled airlines that had not already succumbed to financial pressures.

Since, from a legal standpoint, these were *non-scheduled* airlines, they will not be included in this treatment of scheduled airline service at Prescott. However, a list of known non-scheduled airlines operating at Prescott during the postwar period is included in "Part 3" of the main centennial history.

.

SERVICE SUMMARIES

The airline service summaries that follow are arranged chronologically according to the year that service commenced under that name. To reiterate, the dates shown are not the dates that the airline operated, but the dates that the airline provided service to Prescott. More specific dates of service, when they can be determined using available sources, are listed just below the airline name. Some of the smaller airlines came and went with relatively little fanfare, and in some of those cases, only the month and year appears.

Regarding the described mergers, although the pre-merger and post-merger airline names are staggered due to the chronological listing, the transitions were reasonably smooth and did not interrupt service in any significant way.

1946-1950 Arizona Airways

4/7/46 – 6/1/50 (merger)
Equipment: Douglas DC-3 (C-47)

Service Summary: Arizona Airways was founded by H. O. "Rocky" Nelson with the original purpose of providing wartime primary flight training at Safford, Ariz., under a contract with the U.S. Navy. Following the war, Nelson and his partners purchased three surplus Douglas C-47's (DC-3's) from the War Assets Administration. Scheduled passenger service to cities and towns throughout the state, including Prescott, was inaugurated in April 1946. This was Prescott's first true scheduled airline service. In 1950, Arizona Airways, with its three DC-3's, merged with two Denver-based airlines, Monarch Airlines (with five DC-3's) and Challenger Airlines (with four DC-3's), to form Frontier Airlines.

1947-1949 Trans World Airlines (TWA)

11/1/47 – 12/15/49
Equipment: Douglas DC-3

Service Summary: TWA was the result of the merger of Transcontinental Air Transport and Western Air Express in 1930. The company had recently changed its name from Transcontinental & Western Air, Inc. to Trans World Airlines when it exercised its authority – granted nearly a decade earlier – to operate scheduled Air Mail and passenger service to Prescott in 1947. The first flight was made on November 1.

In 1937-38, TWA officials had enlisted the aid of Grace Sparkes and other Prescott leaders to support the airline's bid for an Air Mail contract for the route between Las Vegas and Phoenix. Sparkes was a master of persuasive letter-writing and her support came with the tacit promise of TWA service to Prescott. Initially, TWA was unable to fulfill that promise and then the war intervened. Now, years later, TWA was finally making good on its pledge.

Far from being a postwar start-up airline, TWA was one of America's pioneer carriers, and certainly the most experienced at navigating the skies over northern Arizona. TWA relied on its Douglas DC-3's to provide service to Prescott, and the airplane used for the inaugural flight was christened "Starliner Hassayampa." Buoyed by the level of airline service that the city was receiving (Arizona Airways *and* TWA), in 1948 Prescott built what was then one of the nicest airport terminals in the state. Unfortunately, in late 1949 TWA politely notified Prescott officials that it would be ending service to the city and would support the bid of Las Vegas-based Bonanza Air Lines to operate the route. In mid-December 1949, after only two years, a DC-3 made TWA's final departure from Ernest A. Love Field. But during that brief period, Prescott appeared on the airline's worldwide route maps, right along with Paris, Lisbon, Rome, Athens, Cairo and all the other glamorous TWA destinations.

1949-1968 Bonanza Air Lines

12/16/49 – 4/17/68 (merger)
Equipment: Douglas DC-3 > Fairchild (Fokker) F-27A Friendship

Service Summary: Bonanza Airlines began service to Prescott in December 1949 as part of its scheduled passenger route between Reno and Phoenix (with stops at Carson City, Hawthorne, Tonopah, Las Vegas, Boulder City, Kingman and Prescott). TWA had sought permission from the CAB to withdraw from the route and supported Bonanza's successful application. Another of the postwar start-ups, Bonanza was initially based in Las Vegas, Nev. The airline flew the Douglas DC-3 (including converted military types acquired from the War Assets Administration), operating a fleet of ten by 1957. In 1956, Bonanza began placing orders for the new F-27A Friendship twin-turboprop airliner to replace the DC-3. The F-27 was designed and built by Fokker in the Netherlands. An American version was built under license by Fairchild, and Bonanza received the first of its 11 F-27A's from Fairchild in 1959.

When Bonanza made its final DC-3 flight in November 1960, the company began advertising itself as the "first all jet-powered airline in America." Called "Silver Darts" by Bonanza, the F-27A's were much faster than the DC-3's and could accommodate nearly twice as many passengers (40) in the comfort of a pressurized cabin.

In 1966, Bonanza began placing Douglas DC-9 jets in service on its longer routes and moved its headquarters and maintenance facility to Phoenix Sky Harbor. A merger between Bonanza Air Lines, Seattle-based West Coast Airlines and San Francisco-based Pacific Air Lines was approved by the CAB in April 1968. The new company was named Air West.

1950-1964 Frontier Airlines

6/1/50 (merger) – 8/64
Equipment: Douglas DC-3

Service Summary: Frontier Airlines was formed by the merger of Arizona Airways with two Denver-based carriers, Monarch Airlines and Challenger Airlines. The three small fleets of DC-3's were combined, and on June 1, 1950, Frontier's Denver-based "Sunliners" began operating over the former Arizona Airways routes, which included service to Prescott. During the years that Frontier and its friendly rival, Bonanza, operated at Ernest A. Love Field, the two companies and their station personnel became very active in the community.

Ultimately, Prescott and Flagstaff, served by both Bonanza and Frontier, did not provide enough passengers to support both carriers. With CAB approval, in August 1964 Frontier withdrew from Prescott, while continuing to serve Flagstaff. Conversely, Bonanza withdrew from Flagstaff while continuing to serve Prescott.

1968-1970 Air West / Hughes Airwest

4/17/68 – 9/26/70
Equipment: Fairchild (Fokker) F-27A Friendship

Service Summary: In April 1968, the CAB approved the merger of Phoenix-based Bonanza Air Lines, Seattle-based West Coast Airlines and San Francisco-based Pacific Air Lines. Air West, as the new company was called, set up its headquarters in the former offices of Pacific Air Lines in San Francisco. Bonanza's recently-opened Phoenix headquarters became the Air West maintenance base. In March 1970, a company owned by Howard Hughes acquired Air West. The name was changed to Hughes Airwest and soon, all of the planes were painted bright yellow and introduced as the "Sundance Fleet." In the minds of the public, however, the yellow color combined with the shape of the DC-9 jets (by then the predominant aircraft in the fleet) evoked a different image. Recognizing this, the airline's references to the Sundance Fleet faded, and its advertising slogan became "Top Banana in the West."

In mid-September 1970, Hughes Airwest received approval from the CAB (subject to certain stipulations) to suspend service to Prescott and allow Apache Airlines to fly the route instead. In an arrangement that was loosely referred to as "subcontracting" the service authority, the transition was completed on September 26th.

1970-1971 Apache Airlines

6/1/70 – 5/6/71
Equipment: Carstedt CJ-600A (de Havilland DH.104 Dove conversion)

Service Summary: In 1970, Hughes Airwest requested authorization from the CAB to discontinue service to Prescott and Kingman and allow Phoenix-based Apache Airlines fly the route instead. The CAB granted a three-year suspension in mid-September subject to certain stipulations.

Apache had been operating since 1957, initially serving cities and towns in southern Arizona. While waiting for CAB approval, Hughes had reduced the number of daily flights at Prescott, until by June 1970, there was only one daily flight each way (Las Vegas-Phoenix) and only on weekdays. Beginning in June, with the CAB ruling still pending, Apache reportedly began flights to Prescott. These were characterized as supplemental to the existing, though paltry, Hughes service. Hughes ceased operations at Prescott on September 26th, at which point Apache became the sole provider. Some referred to this arrangement as "subcontracting" the route authority.

When service to Prescott was initiated, Apache was operating a small fleet of Carstedt CJ-600A's, which were British-built de Havilland DH.104 Doves that had been modified and could accommodate 18 passengers. The airline had previous experience operating both stock and modified versions of the Doves as well as the four-engine de Havilland Herons. The Carstedt conversion included replacing the reciprocating engines with state-of-the-art Garrett AiResearch turboprop engines.

In May 1971, one of the CJ-600A's, en route from Tucson to Phoenix, inexplicably crashed into a field near Coolidge, killing all 12 on board. The initial investigation raised concerns about the airworthiness of the CJ-600A's, so the remainder of Apache's fleet was grounded. Despite several attempts to restart operations, in September Apache Airlines folded. Prescott, like several other Arizona communities, was left without air service through most of the summer. Under the terms of the CAB's 1970 suspension order, Hughes Airwest was obligated to resume its Prescott service, which it finally did in September.

1971-1973 Hughes Airwest

9/71 – 4/6/73
Equipment: Fairchild (Fokker) F-27A Friendship

Service Summary: When Apache Airlines was grounded in May 1971, Prescott was left without air service. The terms of the 1970 CAB suspension order required Hughes Airwest to resume flights to the city. In September 1971, the big yellow F-27's returned to Ernest A. Love Field. Throughout the Air West / Hughes Airwest years, the Fairchilds continued to be utilized for service to Prescott. Many long-time Prescott residents remember the ear-splitting scream of the Rolls-Royce Dart turboprops as the F-27's taxied to the ramp and the feeling of relief when the engines were finally shut down. [the F-27 cabin interior was surprisingly quiet].

When new federal anti-hijacking regulations were implemented in January 1973, Prescott was faced with the expense of having security personnel at the passenger gate whenever Hughes Airwest flights arrived and departed. After initially being handed stiff fines for noncompliance, Prescott's city council opted to request that service by Hughes Airwest be terminated and provided instead by Cochise Airlines, a much smaller, intrastate airline. This move wasn't a problem for Hughes, since some weeks earlier the airline had sought the CAB's permission to withdraw from Prescott.

From Prescott's perspective, Hughes had become the most unreliable airline to ever serve the city. First there was the "subcontracting" of the route authority to Apache Airlines in 1970, which ultimately resulted in nearly four months without service. Then, just four months after that was resolved, Hughes mechanics went on strike, and the airline left the city unserved for another four months (12/71 to 4/72). Finally, Hughes became increasingly adamant about seeking CAB authorization to drop Prescott. Publicly, the airline said it wanted to dispose of its F-27's and discontinue flights to the airports served by the type, preferring instead to concentrate on DC-9

jet service to larger cities. Thus, despite a high regard among locals for the old Bonanza Air Lines, when the last Hughes Airwest flight departed Prescott on April 6, 1973, it was amid a general feeling of ambivalence. The city would now save the substantial costs involved in providing security at the passenger gate. It's doubtful, however, that most Prescottonians could have appreciated just how difficult it would be to duplicate the level of service that the city had enjoyed for more than a decade: 40-passenger, turbine-powered, pressurized aircraft flown by two pilots (not to mention cabin service from flight attendants most recently attired in designer uniforms, including mini-skirts and go-go boots). Dramatic changes in the economics of the airline industry, reduced federal subsidies, and finally in 1978, sweeping airline deregulation, all combined to have an enormous impact on air service to rural areas and smaller cities.

Hughes Airwest was acquired by Republic Airlines in 1980, and in turn, Republic was acquired by Northwest Airlines in 1986. There were several Arizona pilots who started their careers flying DC-3's for Bonanza, but retired as senior captains flying large jets for Northwest (with four airline name changes and at least as many new paint jobs in between!).

1973-1982 Cochise Airlines

4/9/73 – 3/31/82
Equipment: Cessna 402 (and possibly de Havilland DHC-6 Twin Otter) >
Fairchild Swearingen SA226-TC Metroliner II

Service Summary: Having been ordered to comply with expensive new federal regulations regarding security at airports served by large air carriers, in January 1973 the City of Prescott requested that service by Hughes Airwest be terminated. As an alternative, the city council decided to seek service from an intrastate airline, which would exempt the airport from the federal security requirements. At the time, Tucson-based Cochise Airlines was already serving several Arizona cities. Cochise had been formed in 1971 specifically to take over the routes that were abandoned when Apache Airlines ceased operations. On Friday, April 6, 1973, the last Hughes Airwest flight departed Prescott, and on the following Monday, Cochise inaugurated service to the city with its 10-passenger, twin-engine Cessna 402's and 19-passenger de Havilland DHC-6 Twin Otters. Under the terms of the agreement between Cochise Airlines and the city, the airport's new manager, Rudy Clarke, was also to serve as the airline's Prescott station manager.

After operating for several years as an intrastate carrier, on August 31, 1978, Cochise became one of the first commuter airlines in the nation to receive official certification from the Civil Aeronautics Board. It was authorized to serve Prescott and several other cities in Arizona, Nevada, and Southern California. The new designation would mean increased subsidies for the airline. It also improved Prescott's ability to secure federal airport grants. The airline began to replace its Cessna 402's and Twin Otters with twin-turboprop Swearingen SA226-TC Metroliner II's which could accommodate 17 passengers in a pressurized and air-conditioned cabin. Metroliner service to Prescott commenced in December 1979. As the company expanded, it began operating Convair 440's on some routes (primarily between Tucson, Phoenix, Yuma and San Diego).

Citing an insufficient subsidy, in 1981 Cochise requested that it be released from its obligation to provide service to Prescott. The CAB eventually approved the request and Cochise terminated the Prescott flights at the end of March 1982. The airline filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy about two weeks later.

1979-1981 Desert Pacific Airlines

12/79 – 2/10/81
Equipment: Piper PA-31 Navajo

Service Summary: This Sedona-based company began service to Prescott in 1979 utilizing twin-engine Piper PA-31 Navajos. Its route system eventually included Los Angeles, San Diego, Lake Havasu, Bagdad, Sedona, Flagstaff, Winslow and Durango. On February 10, 1981, a Desert Pacific Navajo crashed on departure from Prescott, resulting in serious injuries to nine of the ten people on board. Following this accident, the airline suspended all operations.

1982-1988 Golden Pacific Airlines

4/1/82 – 12/21/88
Equipment: Cessna 402C

Service Summary: Golden Pacific Airlines, based in Kingman, was selected by the CAB from among three applicants to provide service to Prescott after Cochise Airlines relinquished the route. The city council had supported one of the other applicants, but accepted the CAB's choice. When Golden Pacific inaugurated flights to Prescott on April 1, 1982, its fleet consisted of two Cessna 402C's (backed up by single-engine airplanes, if needed). At various times officials of Golden Pacific announced plans to acquire larger turboprop aircraft. In 1984 it was reported that the airline was operating seven daily flights from Prescott to Phoenix. However, the airline's overall operation gave some observers the impression that it was chronically undercapitalized. During 1988, Golden Pacific planes were involved in two accidents at Prescott, one in January and the other in August. Neither resulted in injuries.

On December 21, 1988, just four days before Christmas, Golden Pacific abruptly canceled all flights, leaving many holiday travelers stranded. Even the airline's employees were caught by surprise, some working without pay to help stranded passengers. A few days after Christmas, it was reported that Golden Pacific owed several Arizona cities sizable sums for fuel, rent, etc. The largest debt was $56,000 owed to Prescott [$155k in 2026]. The airline's status became crystal clear when company representatives failed to show up for a scheduled meeting with Prescott officials.

1984-1985 Sun West Airlines

8/84 – 3/85
Equipment: Beech C99 Commuter (backed-up by Piper PA-31 Navajo)

Service Summary: In 1980, Scottsdale Charter, Inc. became Sun West Airlines, moving its base to Phoenix Sky Harbor. Headed by John Walters, the airline initially operated Piper PA-31 Navajos. Turboprop Beech C99 Commuters were added to the fleet in 1983. Besides serving Arizona cities, the airline specialized in service between Phoenix and Durango, Colo., by way of Gallup and Farmington, N.M. In August 1984, Sun West commenced service to Prescott, going head-to-head with Golden Pacific, which had been awarded the Essential Air Service subsidy for the route. In March of the following year, cash flow problems, then bankruptcy took Sun West out of the airline business.

1988-1988 StatesWest Airlines

4/3/88 – 8/88
Equipment: Short 360 Advanced (and possibly BAe Jetstream 31)

Service Summary: StatesWest was founded in 1986 by colorful Phoenix businessman, Rudy Miller. Its initial focus was on service to Laughlin, Nev. (Bullhead City Airport) from Phoenix and several California cities. Over its roughly seven years of existence, the airline hopped from one strategy to another, involving an array of different aircraft, routes and destinations, all in a quest to find a business model that might turn out to be profitable. For the first few years, StatesWest entered markets and often stayed just long enough to push the incumbent airline over the financial brink.

At its zenith in 1990-91, StatesWest operated a number of routes – primarily in California – as USAir Express under an agreement with USAir. At that point, the airline ceased flying under the StatesWest name.

At Prescott, Miller's company purchased a popular restaurant and announced plans to develop a conference center near the airport. Nevertheless, the presence of StatesWest at Ernest A. Love Field was early and brief. Available sources indicate the company began service to Prescott in April 1988 and had withdrawn by August the same year.

1989-2005 Mesa Airlines / America West Express

2/89 – 6/05
Equipment: Beech 99; Cessna 208 Caravan > Beech (Raytheon-Beech) 1900

Service Summary: In 1982, Larry L. Risley and his wife, Janie, mortgaged their home and car to purchase a small Farmington, New Mexico, charter company. During the next several years the Risleys built tiny Mesa Air Shuttle into Mesa Airlines, one of the largest regional airlines in America, with seven separate airlines under its umbrella by the mid-1990s. Mesa's service to Prescott was initiated in February 1989 following the demise of Golden Pacific Airlines.

In 1992, Mesa entered into a code-sharing agreement with Phoenix-based America West Airlines. Under this arrangement, Mesa served Prescott as America West Express. The airline initially used the Beech 99 and on occasion, the single-turboprop Cessna 208 Caravan. Ultimately it relied its large fleet of 19-passenger twin-turboprop Beechcraft (Raytheon-Beech) 1900's for its Prescott routes.

In February 2005, the Arizona Department of Transportation, which administers the Essential Air Service (EAS) subsidies in the state, announced that it was going to contract with Great Lakes Airlines to provide service to Prescott (as well as Kingman, Page, and Show Low). This decision was met with opposition by many Yavapai County residents and Prescott city officials who felt that, for several reasons, the move would amount to a step backward for local airline service.

1991-1994 Arizona Pacific Airways

9/91 – 2/94
Equipment: Piper PA-31 Navajo / Mohave

Service Summary: Arizona Pacific Airways was organized in Prescott to provide service to Phoenix and challenge Mesa Airlines for the federal subsidy. Scheduled service operated from Ernest A. Love Field for un undetermined period of time. Flights were being made to Phoenix Sky Harbor as late as February 1994, but it isn't clear if such flights were scheduled or on-demand. On February 21, 1994, an Arizona Pacific Navajo departed Prescott for Phoenix. After landing at Sky Harbor, the pilot observed that there was a fire in the right engine (later determined to be caused by a leaking fuel line). All four occupants exited the plane, with only one minor injury. No further references to Arizona Pacific have been located.

2005-2007 Great Lakes Airlines

6/05 – 10/07
Equipment: Beech (Raytheon-Beech) 1900D

Service Summary: In June 2005, Great Lakes Airlines replaced Mesa Airlines / America West Express as the provider of scheduled airline service to Prescott and several other Arizona cities under the terms of a newly-awarded Essential Air Service (EAS) contract. The airline was based in Cheyenne, WY, and operated a hub at Denver. In 2007, the EAS subsidy was awarded to Air Midwest, part of Mesa Air Group (operating as US Airways Express). At that point, Great Lakes withdrew from Prescott.

2007-2008 Air Midwest (Mesa Air Group) operating as US Airways Express

10/07 – 5/31/08
Equipment: Beech (Raytheon-Beech) 1900

Service Summary: Having been awarded the Essential Air Service (EAS) contract, Air Midwest began service to Prescott in October 2007. In early 2008, officials from Prescott and Prescott Valley began discussing a locally-subsidized contract with Horizon Air for service between Prescott and Los Angeles. That contract, separate from the federal EAS award, was executed in the Spring. In May 2008, Mesa Air Group announced that Air Midwest would terminate its EAS service by the end of the month.

2008-2010 Horizon Air

9/8/08 – 8/22/10
Equipment: Bombardier Q400 (DHC Dash 8)

Service Summary: In a somewhat novel approach to enticing local air service, in 2008, Prescott and Prescott Valley contracted with Seattle-based Horizon Air to provide flights between Prescott and Los Angeles. This locally-subsidized service would be apart from and operate concurrent with the federal Essential Air Service (EAS) contract route (Las Vegas-Kingman-Prescott-Phoenix, or some variation thereof). At the time this agreement was consummated, Air Midwest (Mesa Air Group) had been operating the EAS route. With the announcement in May 2008 of the planned service by Horizon Air, Air Midwest chose to relinquish its EAS contract, effective at the end of May.

Horizon began flying its turboprop Bombardier Q400's into Prescott in early September. The Q400's could accommodate more than 70 passengers. In terms of seating capacity, the Q400 remains by far the largest aircraft to provide scheduled service to Prescott (as of 2026).

After nearly two years, in what was described in one newspaper headline as a "bittersweet end," Horizon Air announced it would terminate service to Prescott in late August 2010.

2008-2018 Great Lakes Airlines

9/8/08 – 3/26/18
Equipment: Beech (Raytheon-Beech) 1900D

Service Summary: For more than three decades, airline service to Prescott had been, for lack of a better word, *tumultuous*. Great Lakes Airlines reentered the Prescott market at a particularly uncertain time. Mesa Air Group had just withdrawn its Air Midwest subsidiary from the Essential Air Service (EAS) contract, presumably in response to Horizon Air's plans to inaugurate locally-subsidized service to Los Angeles in its big Bombardier Q400's. In June 2008, with Horizon still three months away from starting service and Air Midwest now just a memory, Prescott was left for a few weeks with no airline service. Great Lakes bravely submitted the only bid for the EAS subsidy, and the application was expedited by federal and state officials.

For a decade, with significant headwinds and challenges, Great Lakes brought its now-ubiquitous Beech 1900D's through Prescott day-in and day-out. The airline initially offered flights to Phoenix and Ontario, Calif., and at one point, service to Denver was provided.

A significant challenge to the daily operations of many of the nation's regional airlines was the 2013 federal regulation requiring first officers (copilots) to have at least 1500 flight hours, as well as more stringent rules governing duty time for crew members. This had an almost instantaneous effect on pilot hiring and staffing. Great Lakes was one of the regional airlines that was forced on some occasions to remove 9 seats from its 19-passenger planes in order to remain compliant with the regulations (allowing single-pilot operation).

In March 2018, after a total of over twelve years at Prescott, Great Lakes Airlines announced that it was suspending all scheduled flight operations systemwide.

2018-Pres. SkyWest Airlines operating as **United Express**

8/18 – Present
Equipment: Bombardier (Canadair) CRJ-200

Service Summary: Based at St. George, UT, SkyWest is a major regional airline, operating at Prescott as United Express. Following the suspension of flights by Great Lakes Airlines in March 2018, Ernest A. Love Field was left, once again, with no airline service. SkyWest was reportedly wooed by local leaders and its eventual application for the Essential Air Service contract received the strong support from Prescott and the surrounding communities. Since commencing flights to Prescott in August 2018, United Express has sustained a high level of service utilizing its 50-passenger Bombardier (Canadair) CRJ-200 regional jets as primary equipment. As of June 2026, SkyWest is operating three flights daily, two to Denver and one to Los Angeles.

NOTES – Destinations and Frequency

These summaries are intended to provide a brief profile of each airline that served Prescott. Largely absent from the profiles is detailed information about destinations and frequency. This isn't because it's unimportant – *it's crucial.* However, these variables have changed so often over the past seven decades that it would require many more pages and change the character of this presentation.

It's not enough for an airline to simply fly in and out of an airport. The usefulness of regional airline service to residents of cities like Prescott is heavily dependent on several factors, including destinations offered, as well as frequency and departure times.

Initially, Arizona Airways experimented with several variations of the intrastate north-south route, trying to serve as many Arizona towns as possible. Soon, however, a more streamlined and viable system evolved. After the mid-1960s and prior to airline deregulation (1978), air service at Prescott was usually tied to Phoenix at one end and Las Vegas at the other (most often with a stop at Kingman). Even after deregulation, the federal Essential Air Service (EAS) program generally stuck with that route, primarily because it was a reasonably efficient way to provide service to Prescott *and* Kingman. An intrastate airline that wasn't seeking federal route authority from the CAB or bidding for a post-deregulation EAS subsidy was free to design its own route system. Such airlines, usually quite small, did occasionally operate under that business strategy, but it was a tough way to make a living, especially as the Twentieth Century came to a close.

In more recent decades, the absolute preeminence of the hub & spoke system, combined with code-share agreements and the feeder concept have transformed the nation's air transportation system. At Prescott's level, the most noticeable change is that the EAS program is no longer tied to legacy routes. Based on input from the local communities and the airline service providers, proposals for new destinations may be entertained by federal and state administrators. From a practical standpoint, however, these destinations must always be major hubs. At this writing, and at other times in the recent past, the traditional airline service from Prescott to Phoenix Sky Harbor is not provided. Instead, SkyWest / United Express currently offers three daily departures, two to Denver and one to Los Angeles. To catch flights from Sky Harbor, good highways and reliable ground shuttles are the available options. Prescott's proximity to Phoenix has always made ground travel a viable option, but the convenience factor ebbs and flows with the quality of the highway system at any point in time.

One final, but important, consideration is *where* at the destination airport the airline deplanes passengers. With the current jet service this has become less problematic. In the past, however, it could be a real adventure. The flight to Sky Harbor in a 19-passenger Beech was usually smooth and fast, however the challenge began when the plane landed. It depended on where the airline was able to beg, borrow or steal ramp space. In the worst case scenario, the passengers exited the plane only to face one of those "you can't get there from here" scenarios. It was not for the faint of heart, and negated many of the advantages of taking a plane to Phoenix. During one period it was routine for passengers to be deposited on the tarmac at the far end of one of the mammoth terminals, where they were unceremoniously given their baggage with the unspoken words, *Vaya con Dios, mi amigo.*

SERVICE TIMELINE

A graphic airline service timeline is included in this project. It utilizes a very basic spreadsheet format and the start/stop dates are accurate only to the nearest six-month block. Nevertheless, it provides a nice visual representation of the 80-year history of airline service at Ernest A. Love Field. It is presented as four separate pages, and those pages may be printed and assembled if the reader is so inclined.

2026 DAVID M. DUPREE lovePRC100.com



Arizona Airways Douglas DC-3 (C-47A), NC64910, at Ernest A. Love Field circa 1946.



Bonanza Air Lines Fairchild (Fokker) F-27A Friendship, N146L, at Las Vegas.