

Executive Summary

With the concern of airline safety recently, I wanted to look at data in a few different ways. Do safety concerns impact income? Is air travel safe? Can we compare air travel to other modes of transportation? And what is the impact of air travel? The slides that accompany this summary help tell these stories.

In the last twenty years, there have been three major events that have severely impacted airline income. They were major global, catastrophic events. The 9/11 terrorist attacks and the ensuing changes to air travel, the 2009 Great Recession, and the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic. While a case could be made that the terrorist attacks were related to safety, they were not related to equipment safety or due to an accident.

In fact, the number of airline passengers has steadily increased since 2001, until the global pandemic hit in 2020, causing a significant drop in ridership. Again, this was not equipment or mechanical safety related. This was personal and physical distance safety! And the year before the pandemic, the airline industry moved nearly 1 billion passengers. If we look at the actual accident numbers, we see that over the last 20 years we have steadily decreased the number of accidents per 100,000 passenger-miles. More impressive, in the last 10 years there have been less than 1.5 accidents per 100,000 passenger miles!

But accidents still happen. And when they happen to an airplane, it is big news. Why is it such big news? It could be that they are so rare, and when it happens it is noteworthy? It could also be that surviving an airplane crash is also very rare. While the accident numbers are low, the ratio of people that are involved but do not survive is too high. If the airline industry wants to

look at the next area for improvement, it may be to increase survivability in the rare case that an accident does happen.

If we look at car accidents, which are rarely newsworthy these days we see the ratio of fatalities to people involved in a car accident is significantly lower. Even though the actual number of fatalities is much higher! Most people do not have a fear of driving. But some have a fear of flying. Could it be because if an accident happens, the worst happens?

In closing though, the airline industry is too important to let a few accidents ruin all the hard work people of done to make it safe. The airline industry continues to improve its safety measures. More people are flying than ever before when it is not a global pandemic. And airlines provide hundreds of thousands of jobs. Can we improve? Yes! We can always improve. But we have to remember, airlines are incredibly safe and there should be no reason to panic.