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BREAKING NEWS NEWS

O'Hare is once again the nation's busiest airport in terms of total flights

By MARY WISNIEWSKI
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O'Hare International Airport is once again the nation's busiest in terms of total flights, surpassing Atlanta for the first time since 2014, according to federal data.

The total number of flights in and out of O'Hare last year topped 900,000 for the first time since 2007, the Federal Aviation Administration reported Monday. The busiest days occurred during June and July, and the busiest day was June 27, with

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O'Hare also handled more than 83.4 million passengers last year, a 4.5 percent increase over 2017, according to the Chicago Department of Aviation. Both O'Hare and Midway Airport together saw more than 105 million passengers, a new record, the city said.

Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport is still No. 1 in terms of passenger volume, and has held the crown of world's busiest airport by that measure for 20 years. But a travel industry analyst said the new numbers are "excellent news" for Chicago, which is embarking on an \$8.5 billion O'Hare modernization.

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"It reinforces the value of Chicago as both an important local market for people originating and ending their flights, and the strategic importance of both O'Hare and Midway as airline hubs," said Henry Harteveldt, travel industry analyst and president of San Francisco-based Atmosphere Research Group.

Harveldt said there's a "very good chance" O'Hare could reclaim the title of world's busiest airport in terms of passenger volume, once it modernizes its facilities.

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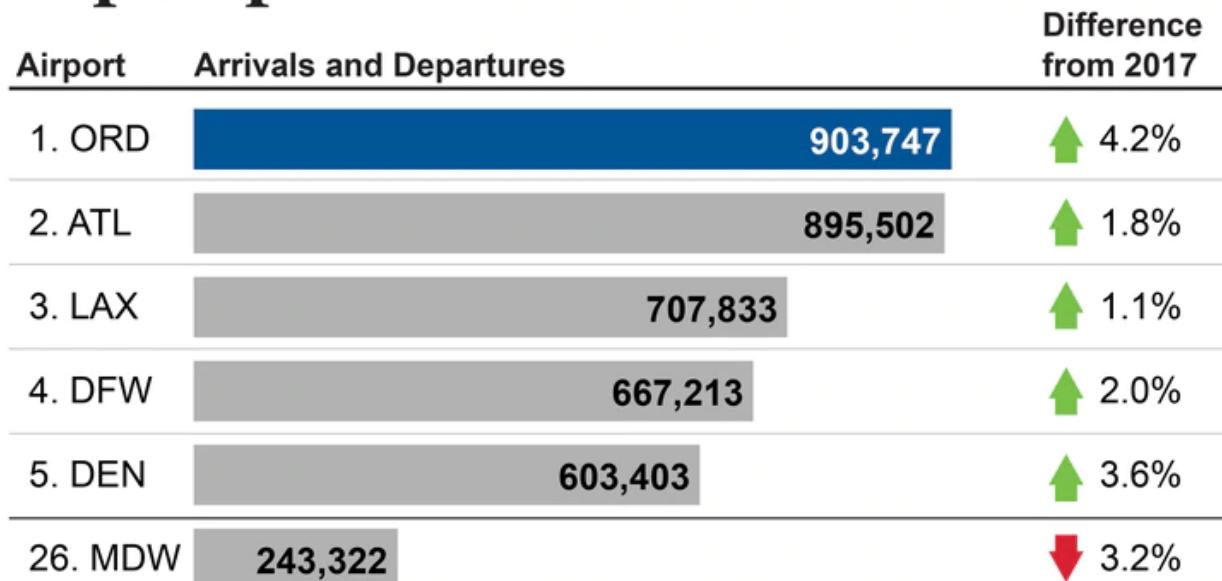
Aviation Commissioner Jamie Rhee noted that last year, O'Hare was named the most connected airport in the U.S. and second in the world behind London's Heathrow.

"We are uniquely poised right in the middle of the country..." Rhee said. "O'Hare is able to serve so many more markets and some of the medium and underserved markets."

O'Hare saw 903,747 flights in 2018, up 4.2 percent compared with the previous year, while Atlanta hosted 895,502 flights, up 1.8 percent, the FAA said. Los Angeles, Dallas/Fort Worth and Denver were in third, fourth and fifth place, respectively.

Midway placed 26th. Total flights at Midway Airport were down 3.2 percent from 2017, to 243,322 flights.

Top airports



Source: Federal Aviation Administration

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(Tribune graphics)

O'Hare also had a big year for air cargo flown through Chicago, with about 1.87 million metric tons, a 5.7 percent rise over

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which means fewer delays and cancellations.

Delta, Atlanta's main airline, has been more aggressive than United and American in getting rid of its smaller, 50-seat airplanes, which helps boost that airport's passenger volume, Harveveldt said.



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But he added that in the airline industry, being the busiest airport is not always the metric that matters.

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"It's more important to be on time and reliable," he said. "Airlines only want to operate at the capacity that makes good business sense."

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Rhee said O'Hare now has a modern airfield, with mostly parallel runways. It needs to complement that with modern

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"The industry is going to continue to upgrade its fleet mix," she said. "We want to make sure our terminal facilities adequately meet that demand."

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Mary Wisniewski



Mary Wisniewski is the transportation reporter and Getting Around columnist for the Tribune. She joined the Tribune in 2016 after stints as a general news reporter at Reuters and transportation reporter for the Chicago Sun-Times. She has written an award-winning biography of Chicago novelist Nelson Algren.

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