

FLY MKG



MUSKEGON AIRPORT

FAQ GUIDE

By Roger Rapoport

What is Denver Air Connection?



This 27 year-old carrier owned by three veteran pilots who fly the line 40 hours a week has one of the best on time records in the aviation community.

Based in Colorado where pilots train on mountain routes, the airline serves 19 airports linking small and medium size communities with major hubs.

[You can read more about the company here.](#)





What kind of plane do they fly from **Muskegon to Chicago?**

The same kind of Embraer twin jets you will fly on major carriers like United and American.

The planes fly at a maximum speed of 600 mph and have a 1,300 mile range.



Previous carriers on this route cancelled some flights. **Has that changed?**



In the first 53 days of service, the company completed all flights in and out of Muskegon. The new airline operated 176 flights in November and December, including a number during winter storms without a single cancellation. A small number of delays were related to FAA Air Traffic control and poor visibility. The company had only a couple of mechanical delays including one where Denver Air bought pizza for all passengers.

How does Ticketing work?



If you are flying domestic flights on American or United you will get interline baggage transfers and through ticketing. The first bag is free on outbound flights, a savings of \$35 or \$175 for a family of five. If your trip begins or ends in Chicago the bag charge is \$15 (beginning in 2025). If your carryon does not fit in the overhead bin you can gate check your bag and pick it up in Chicago when you disembark. Larger checked bags will be at baggage claim. Denver Air Connection anticipates there will be a similar arrangement with another major carrier in 2025.

How do domestic fares from Muskegon **compare with other airports?**



Fares to Chicago are cheaper especially for last minute booking. Advance purchase fares start at \$138 roundtrip and peak at \$178 roundtrip for last minute boarding.

There are also occasional sale fares. In all cases there is no charge for your outbound bag on United and American connections. A recent check on a 21 day advance purchase fare at a nearby West Michigan airport showed a United basic economy ticket to Chicago at \$275 plus a \$35 charge for the first checked bag and an additional charge for a bag stored in the overhead compartment. Fares closer to your departure date from other West Michigan airports to Chicago are running over \$500.



Is it worth paying more for a flight out of Muskegon than **another airport?**

The true cost of flying out of another airport depends on several variables.

Parking is a game changer. It's free at Muskegon and roughly \$100 or more a week at other big city airports. You also have to factor in the safety of your car at a large urban airport. If you are on the road for three weeks that's a \$300 savings, plus the cost of gas and tolls. Keep in mind you can walk from the parking lot to the gate in a couple of minutes. There is no need to wait for a shuttle in freezing weather at this conveniently located airport easily accessible from US 31.



Is Muskegon Airport an advantage in the **winter**?



Definitely. Denver Air Connection is a winter weather specialist and did not cancel a single flight during the most recent storms. During its first month DAC's on time completion rate was 90%, far ahead of the 76% industry average. The airport's snow/ice removal team has won international awards for their outstanding performance.

“We have the right balance of equipment for the amount of pavement we have and our crew is exceptionally great at focusing efforts to get DAC ‘a path in, and a path out,’” says airport director Ken Efting.

Passengers on weather canceled flights in Manistee and Grand Rapids drove to Muskegon during a November storm to fly Denver Air Connection at a lower fare. This is a sharp contrast to Denver Air's predecessor. Flying from Muskegon also eliminates the need to drive for hours back and forth to other airports in black ice, whiteout and blizzard conditions. Travelers can avoid construction and tie-ups caused by accidents like this one below on I-96.



Does Denver Air Connection **cancel flights arbitrarily?**



No. Here's an example. When a tire needed changing at O'Hare for a recent Muskegon bound flight the airline flew in a replacement jet from Denver for the journey. This was done to avoid a long flight delay on the plane that needed that new tire.



What about **other kinds of cancellations?**

Two problems have caused cancellations in the past. One previous carrier flew small aircraft that were not ideal for winter flights because they operated at 5,000 feet and could not cross Lake Michigan. Another bigger regional carrier was at the mercy of its larger parent airline. In some cases Muskegon bound jets were redeployed last minute to fill gaps created by maintenance issue. These planes were diverted for more heavily booked flights to other cities. This explains why some flights were cancelled in good weather.

Are you saying
Denver Air
won't do this?



Exactly. Denver Air is in full control of its fleet.
No other carrier can disrupt their scheduling or redeploy their aircraft.



What about **early**
morning flights?

Denver Air's first flight of the day arrives at O'Hare at 8:50 a.m. To make that schedule you would need to be at the airport around 7:30 a.m. Driving to another airport for an early flight requires a very early morning drive, which can be tricky in winter, or an overnight at a hotel.

Sometimes there is the issue of catching a shuttle or cab very early, not always an easy thing to do.

IN OTHER WORDS:

The true cost of flying out of Muskegon can be less than another airport even if the airfare showing up on my trusty search engine suggests other airports are cheaper.





THE MATH

- \$100 a week or more for parking, plus the cost of gas and tolls to another airport.
- (\$150) A hotel bill if you are trying to catch an earlier flight
- \$35 outbound bag fee and the general hassle of traffic congestion and/or construction.
- There is also the possibility of missing your flight due to construction and dealing with trying to rebook, especially during peak travel times. When that happens you may have to drive to another hub airport or pay for an expensive last minute ticket on another carrier.

If you add up the cost and inconvenience that cheaper fare may not be a bargain at all. All these extra costs can easily add up to

\$400 or more

on a trip of two weeks or longer. These important details will never show up in your search engine.

Green Lots 1 & 2 Parking Rates (Accept Credit Card Payments Only)

Flat 24 Hour Daily Rate **\$20.00**

24 Hour Max: **\$20.00**

*Green 1 and 2 - Additional or Partial Days after the first 24 hours is \$20 Flat Rate/Per 24 Hours.

The Budget Parking Lot Fee
At A Major Michigan Airport

Why connect when I can go to another airport and get a **cheaper ticket?**



Driving to Chicago airports can take three to five hours, even more in bad weather or during rush hour. Keep in mind that many of these nonstops from other West Michigan airports are seasonal, not year around and they don't all operate daily. In addition many year around routes offer just one trip a day. That means that if your flight is cancelled or significantly delayed you will end up having to rebook. That can be tricky because you may have to wait a day or even longer in the case of a nonstop that doesn't operate daily. Also the next nonstop out may be full, forcing you to connect anyway, or just drive back to Muskegon and fly to Chicago on readily available Denver Air Connection seats.





What about sold out flights?

Because it's a new carrier Denver Air Connection can accommodate you. If your nonstop is cancelled at another West Michigan Airport the next flight out, even a connection, may be sold out.

Alternatively you might have to fly a complicated route to get to your destination. That's no fun if you're trying to make a conference, wedding or a cruise. Because 150 people were on your cancelled flight there may not be space available on alternative flights, especially if you're flying during a holiday or the peak summer season.



Does connecting in Chicago make sense when I can book a **cheap nonstop from another West Michigan airport?**



It's hard to beat Denver Air Connection. The 21-day advance purchase roundtrip fare is \$138 and the highest walk on same day roundtrip fare is \$178 with no outbound bag fee.

This is a much better deal than flying out of other Michigan airports, especially when you consider that Chicago has easy ground connections including regional bus and national rail connections that compete well with driving, assuming you use a cab or rideshare for the final leg of your trip.

The airport transit center and direct rail connections to downtown Chicago help you get around local traffic hassles. It is also easy to take an inexpensive bus connection from the transit center to places like Milwaukee, Madison, Rockford, Champaign, Green Bay, Indianapolis, etc. This approach can save you hundreds of dollars over an air connection.





A roundtrip flight to Milwaukee
in mid-December was priced at:

\$682

from a competing
West Michigan airport.

The same trip from Muskegon via air to Chicago
with a 90 minute bus connection
from O'Hare to Milwaukee totals:

\$214

Keep in mind that this route will get you to
Milwaukee just as fast as an air connection.

I am going to Chicago for a long weekend and need a car for a day. **Does it make more sense to drive?**



It depends. If you fly there is no parking charge at the Muskegon airport. Parking for several days in downtown Chicago, depending on where you stay, can end up costing more than your flight. From O'Hare you can easily reach the city by public transit, cab, shuttle or bus.

[See this ground transit link which includes easy transit to cities in Wisconsin and Illinois.](#) Renting a car for the day you need it means you aren't paying for the overnight parking charge which can exceed the cost of the car rental.

Inbound: ORD to MKG

		Tue, 14 Jan from \$69.00	Wed, 15 Jan from \$69.00	Thu, 16 Jan from \$69.00	Fri, 17 Jan from \$69.00	Sat, 18 Jan from \$69.00	Sun, 19 Jan from \$69.00	Mon, 20 Jan from \$69.00		
09:40 17 Jan ORD		50m → ✈ Non-stop KG5745				11:30 17 Jan MKG		from \$69.00		
18:00 17 Jan ORD		50m → ✈ Non-stop KG5775				19:50 17 Jan MKG		from \$69.00		



Doesn't O'Hare offer **far more connections?**

Yes. O'Hare offers far more nonstops on all competing routes as well as as your choice of airports in places like Los Angeles, New York, Arizona or Florida. That means, for example, if weather shuts down New York airports you may be able to switch to a Washington D.C. flight and connect to New York via train.





To get an idea

To get an idea of how flexible an itinerary can be via Chicago have a look at the number of connections this airport offers to San Francisco, a city not served nonstop from West Michigan.

Airlines with direct flights from Chicago (ORD) to San Francisco (SFO)

	American Airlines ONEWORLD	S M T W T F S	First class available	3 daily flights Terminal 3 at ORD, Terminal 1 at SFO
	Alaska Airlines ONEWORLD	S M T W T F S	Business available	1 daily flight Terminal 2 at ORD, Terminal 1 at SFO
	United Airlines STAR ALLIANCE	S M T W T F S	Business available	10-11 daily flights Terminal 1 at ORD, Terminal 3 at SFO

Are there reasons not to fly out of **Muskegon?**



Some people don't like all the walking at O'Hare even though wheelchair assistance is easily available. They would rather spend an extra two to six hours to get to another airport where they can pick up a nonstop flight. However O'Hare has one overwhelming advantage for West Michigan travelers:

From O'Hare there are 869 daily domestic flights to 169 U.S. cities and 108 direct flights to 63 international destinations.

Chances are that with flights to multiple airports in many regions you'll be able to get to your destination (or get home) same day. Unlike smaller airports that may only offer one daily nonstop to a destination, O'Hare has plenty of backup. If your flight is cancelled chances are you'll be able to find another plane within a few hours.



What else do I need to know?

People who have actually flown Denver Air Connection out of Muskegon are returning to the airline in good numbers. Whether your trip is to Chicago or Colorado Springs, San Francisco or Saint Petersburg, this airline is worth your time and money. By the way O'Hare had a 92.58% on time arrival rate in November.

The cancellation
rate here is

0.90%

The airport is also ranked as
**the most connected
hub in America.**

“

I get all this but
I'm not a travel
agent

and I do most of my
booking online, usually
going for the best fare on
an airline I've flown and
trust.

I get what you're saying
but it all sounds
complicated. ”



If you are still
uncertain,
**do what I
did recently:**



Fly one leg out of Muskegon and do the return flight to another West Michigan airport.

Here's what actually happened. The outbound leg was perfect. The flight on Denver Air Connection was on time and I got a \$625 bump coupon on an oversold flight to Phoenix where I was connecting to Tucson. I was rebooked on a nonstop to Tucson because O'Hare has so many good connections. This saved me a Phoenix connection and I had a nice layover at O'Hare where there are good restaurants and the very relaxing rotunda in terminal 3 where you can chill or use the yoga room.

The flight back was a different story.

Arrival to the other West Michigan airport was delayed an hour due to weather and snow removal. The roads back home were bad, with three slides off slowing traffic flow, and it took nearly two hours to get home. I ended up losing a couple of hours and arrived back in Muskegon thirty minutes before the Denver Air Connection flight I passed up landed, on time. Two subsequent flights, including one that began in the midst of an ice storm, were on time.



How do I book Denver Air Connection?

You can book on their website
for flights to Chicago
or direct on American and United
when you are connecting to other cities.

Let me know how your trip goes at
rogerdrapoport@me.com
and I'll share the details here.



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About the Author

If you live in West Michigan and like to travel out of state you have four options: car, bus, train, ferry or plane. Depending on budget, your schedule, and time of year you can make a case for all of them. Regardless of whether you travel on business weekly, take an annual vacation, make trips to see friends and family or enjoy last minute weekend getaways, there are plenty of good options.

This FAQ focuses on one of those options, the Muskegon County Airport which currently offers jet service to Chicago O'Hare. The new carrier, Denver Air Connection, is a well established operator that has evolved from a freight and charter operator to a passenger airline linking small and medium cities to major hubs since 2012.

Although not as well known as some regional carriers that fly with the logos of major airlines under codeshare agreements, important advantages to flying Denver Air Connection have become clear since it began flying from Muskegon to Chicago November 1.

This FAQ spells out what's new and different with this carrier and why it is worthy of your consideration.

Like many of you who are reading this I travel frequently by air on both short hops and longer trips around the country and internationally. Here's a little background on my credentials for this FAQ.

I'm a travel writer, editor and author of many travel books to domestic and international destinations. I am also first vice-chair of the Society of American Travel Writers Editors Council.

I publish widely on aviation issues in newspapers such as the San Francisco Chronicle, Miami Herald, AAA publications and Wired. I am senior editor at Flight Safety Information, a daily industry publication. With 777 Captain Shem Malmquist, a professor at Florida Technical University, I have published two books on air safety, Angle of Attack and Grounded. I am also the producer of the award winning made in Michigan feature film Pilot Error.

As part of my work I have interviewed hundreds of commercial pilots, flight instructors, FAA and National Transportation Safety Board officials as well as flight controllers and many local pilots who fly corporate jets in and out of West Michigan. My father Dan was one of the founders of Misco, the company that is now Howmet, the largest employer in Muskegon County and a major vendor to the aviation industry. Everything you have read in this FAQ is based on my own extensive interviews with county staff and Denver Air Connection officials. For more on my credentials please visit rogerrapoport.com

