



# CARGO-FOCUSED AIRPORTS IN THE U.S.

## SHINE BRIGHTLY DURING THE PERSISTENT AIR FREIGHT DOWNTURN

Executive Summary of New Report | August 17, 2023

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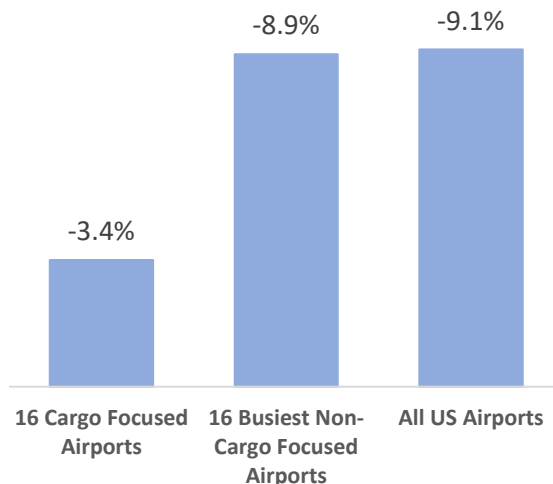
Cargo-focused airports, which specialize in air-freight shipments, markedly outperformed other U.S. airports over the 12 months ending in April 2023. The ability of these airports to provide users with extensive operational flexibility, land for warehouse development and maintenance facilities, and lower fees appears to underlie their recent success. The strongest performers included California’s San Bernardino International, Ohio’s Wilmington Air Park, and Chicago/Rockford International.

We summarize below **key takeaways** from *The Expanding Role of Cargo-Oriented Airports in the United States since the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic*, our **new 15-page report** prepared for a major transportation conference available [here](#).

Our findings are based on newly released federal data on domestic cargo traffic for all airports on the U.S. mainland. This approach avoids the lag in the release of international data and the problems with often-cited landed-weight data (see our sidebar in the report, pg. 4). **We define cargo-focused airports as** those handling: 1) at least 20 million pounds (9.07 metric tons) of domestic air cargo annually; and 2) fewer than 320,000 passengers in 2022. Those outside these thresholds rank well outside the top 125 airports in the above categories. In the midst of the traffic downturn:

**Cargo Traffic Decline at Airports on U.S. Mainland**

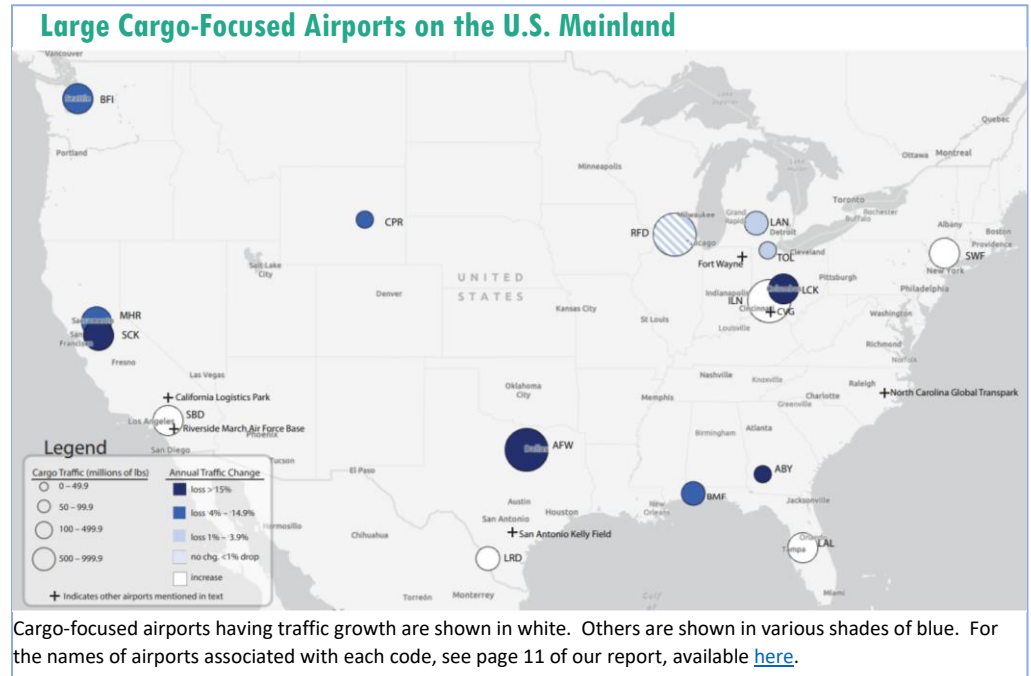
Rolling 12 months, April 2022 - April 2023



- **Cargo traffic at the 16 cargo-focused airports declined only 3.4%** during the 12 months ending in April versus the previous year, less than half of the 8.9% drop at the mainland’s 16 largest cargo-handling airports that have more extensive passenger traffic. Traffic at U.S. airports on the whole dropped even more, by 9.1%.

- **The strength of cargo-focused airports is being driven by San Bernardino International (up 11.4%), Florida’s Lakeland-Linder Airport (up 5.0%), and Ohio’s Wilmington Air Park (up 4.6%), and the more nascent Laredo International (up 9.1%).** Chicago/Rockford International had steady traffic, despite losses greater than 10% and other major airports located nearby. (See chart on pg. 11 of our report).

- **Five of the 16 cargo-focused airports saw traffic growth, and 10 outperformed the national average.** Conversely, only one of the mainland’s 16 top cargo-carrying airports that have greater passenger traffic grew and only four outperformed the national average.



The one that grew, Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky International, saw extensive Amazon Air expansion. (See pg. 10).

- **Eleven cargo-focused airports now rank in the top 100 in traffic, up from nine in 2019; two now rank in the top 20, up from just one – Chicago/Rockford – in 2019.** Nine of the 16 rose in rank over the past year and only four fell. Chicago/Rockford rose from 17th to 14th, and San Bernardino rose from 33rd to 28th, after ranking 85th in 2019. Lakeland-Linder rose from 40th to 36th, after having no reported 2019 traffic. Wilmington rose from 25th to 24th, after being 70th in 2019. and Fort Worth Alliance remained 18th (See chart on pg. 12).
- **Functioning as a hub for Amazon Air, FedEx, or UPS has shielded all types of airports from much of the traffic declines faced by other airports.** Over the past year, Amazon Air hubs statistically outperformed integrator hubs, while integrator hubs outperformed non-cargo-hub airports. Although Amazon Air may have accounted for only a small share of cargo, its countercyclical growth and its recent focus on its largest hubs helped offset cutbacks by other carriers (See chart on pg. 13).
- **Since the calendar year 2019, traffic at the 16 cargo-focused airports has grown by 53.6%, compared to 2.4% at the 16 largest mixed-purpose airports and 12.2% at all U.S. airports.** Evaluating changes over this longer period using this study’s methodology, however, may be subject to selection bias, considering that we do not evaluate airports that declined prior to 2022.

These findings make clear that cargo-focused airports are enjoying post-pandemic success. You can access the full report [here](#) and find contact information for the study team below.

