

CASE STUDY

FRESNO, CALIFORNIA – A SMALL HUB WITH GROWING AIR SERVICE AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

Fresno is in the Central Valley of California, one of the world's most important and productive agricultural areas. It is the closest city to the major national parks: Yosemite, Sequoia, and Kings Canyon. The metropolitan area anchored by Fresno is the third largest in northern California, after the San Francisco Bay area and the Greater Sacramento region.

Fresno is the largest city within several adjoining Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA): The Fresno, Madera, and Hanford-Corcoran. Together, they constitute the larger Fresno-Madera-Hanford Combined Statistical Area (CSA or Greater Fresno). That CSA is the 45th largest in the U.S. in population, just behind the Birmingham (AL) area and ahead of Harrisburg (PA).

Fresno Yosemite International Airport (FAT) is the only commercial service airport in the region. There are few other options for travelers in the immediate area: Sacramento International (SMF) is about 190 miles to the northwest, San Jose International (SJC) is 160 miles to the west. Oakland International Airport is 175 miles away. San Francisco International Airport is 190 miles. Traffic congestion especially around the Bay Area adds to travel time and uncertainty. Other potential airport alternatives in the Greater Los Angeles area are further away; Los Angeles International is roughly 225 miles to the south (3.5 hours driving) and suffers from similar uncertain travel times due to highway congestion.



The region is included as a case study because it is an FAA-defined small hub and it has shown overall growth in air traffic activity over the period 2008-2019.

[Overview of the Region and its Economy](#)

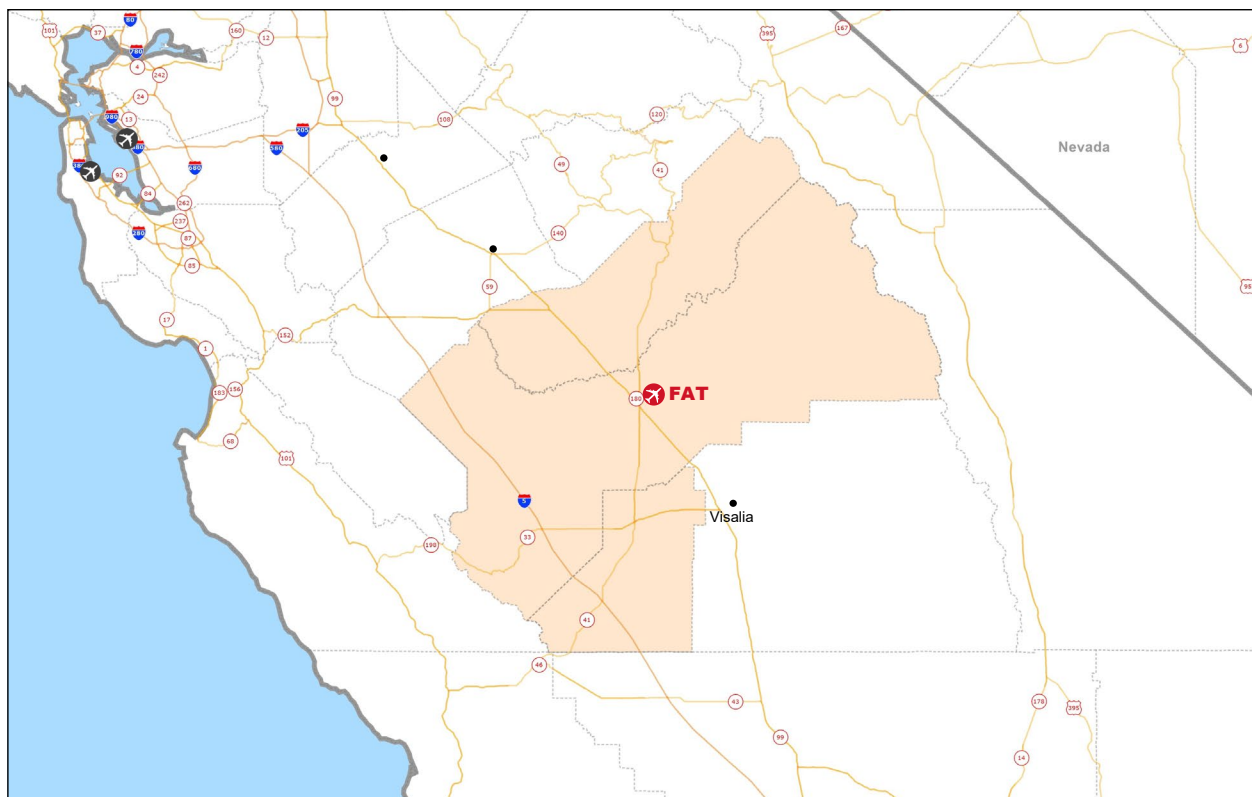
The Fresno-Madera-Hanford Combined Statistical Area (CSA) is home to a mix of urban environments, centered on its largest urban center Fresno, and significant agricultural production. Located within the heart of San Joaquin Valley in California's Central Valley, the Fresno-Madera-Hanford CSA is part of one of the United States most productive agricultural regions for fruits, nuts, and vegetables in particular. As of 2019, the CSA had an estimated population of 1,309,368 persons, growing at a compound rate of 0.7 percent per annum since 2008. The CSA has a population which is somewhat less educated than California's state average, with only 21 percent of the CSA's population holding a bachelor's degree or higher and only 76 percent of the population having a high school degree or higher (vs 89 percent nationally). In 2019, the median household income in the CSA totaled \$58,788 while per capita income was \$24,912. Household and per capita incomes are lower in the CSA than both the state and national



averages. Nearly 20 percent of the CSA's population is classified as below the poverty line, approximately 1.6 times higher than the state and national average.

The Fresno area includes a mix of urban environments and intensive agriculture and rural environments. While the largest employment categories in the CSA are related to government, healthcare, and services industries, between 4-5 percent of employment in the CSA is farm employment over the past 14 years. This farm employment rate is much higher than the national average of 1.3 percent in 2019 reflecting the high concentration of agricultural employment in the region.¹ Government employment in the region includes local, county, and state governments, the 144th Fighter Wing of the California Air National Guard based at FAT, and the CSA's largest education employer California State University, Fresno. The CSA is also well situated along major transportation corridors including Interstate 5, State Route 99, and two Class I railways providing critical surface access for individuals and industry in and out of the region. Fresno is the CSA's largest population center, with the city accounting for approximately 40 percent of the CSA's population and more than three-quarters of the CSA's population located within Fresno County.

Figure 1: The Fresno CSA



According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), in 2019:

- the Fresno MSA had a 2019 population of just under 1 million, making it the 54th largest in the nation (out of 384 total MSAs). Fresno produced \$50.7 billion in current-dollar total GDP, ranked 65th among MSAs, representing a slight increase in ranking from 2009. In 2019,

¹ USDA ERS, *Ag and Food Sectors in the Economy*, 2020.



Fresno had a per capita personal income (PCPI) of \$45,487. This PCPI ranked 234th in the United States and was 81 percent of the national average, \$56,490.

- The Hanford-Corcoran MSA had a 2019 population of 152,940, ranked 272nd in the nation. The MSA produced \$7.2 billion in current-dollar total GDP, ranked 277th among MSAs. Per capita personal income (PCPI) in the MSA was \$39,433. This ranked 352nd in the United States and was 70 percent of the national average.
- The Madera MSAs had a 2019 population of 157,327, which ranked 267th in the nation. It produced \$7.1 billion in current-dollar total GDP, 281st among MSAs, up from 333rd in 2009. Per capita personal income in 2019 was \$41,267, which ranked 320th in the country, 73 percent of the national average, \$56,490.

The region's population and employment have grown moderately since 2008. Table 1 summarizes the changes in key socio-economic characteristics for the period. As shown, from 2008 through 2019:

- Total population rose by about 100,000 (8 percent). As a point of comparison, the population for the state of California also increased by 8 percent over the period.
- Total employment increased by 96,000 (17 percent). Total statewide employment for California increased by 17 percent over the period.
- Average per capita income (nominal dollars) rose from under \$30,000 to \$44,300 (49 percent), the same percentage increase as experienced for California. Expressed in constant 2019 dollars, the increase was 22 percent.
- The number of establishments operating in the region also increased, rising by more than 8,000 (24 percent).²

Table 1: Summary of Changes in Major Socio-Economic Variables, Greater Fresno, 2008-2019

| | 2008 | 2015 | 2019 | Change 2008-15 | | Change 2015-19 | | Change 2008-19 | |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------|--------|----------------|-----|----------------|-----|----------------|-----|
| | | | | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| Population | 1,210 | 1,273 | 1,309 | 63 | 5% | 36 | 3% | 99 | 8% |
| Total Employment | 560 | 598 | 656 | 38 | 7% | 58 | 10% | 96 | 17% |
| Private Non-farm Employment | 427 | 470 | 520 | 43 | 10% | 50 | 11% | 93 | 22% |
| Government Employment | 104 | 99 | 109 | (5) | -5% | 10 | 10% | 5 | 5% |
| Income per Capita (\$) | 29,784 | 38,927 | 44,273 | \$9,143 | 31% | \$5,346 | 14% | \$14,489 | 49% |
| Number of Establishments | 34 | 36 | 42 | 2 | 7% | 6 | 17% | 8 | 24% |

Source: BEA

Note: All figures shown in 1000s except income per capita, which is shown in nominal dollars.

Regional Economic Strengths

The Fresno CSA is home to an economy of contrasts. While government and services industries make up the largest share of employment in the region, the CSA features approximately three times the national average of farm employees as a percentage of total CSA employment. Still, total farm employment in

² The BEA uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau on "establishments," which it defines as "An establishment is a single physical location at which business is conducted or services or industrial operations are performed. It is not necessarily identical with a company or enterprise, which may consist of one or more establishments. ... Establishment counts represent the number of locations with paid employees any time during the year." The count excludes government establishments except for certain situations, such as state-operated retail liquor stores, local government-owned/operated hospitals, and federally-chartered credit unions.

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/susb/about/glossary.html>



the region declined during the 2008-2019 period. (See Table 2.) Conversely, the area has seen a strong growth in health care employment over the past decade, as well as growth in hospitality-related employment and administrative and support services. Transportation and warehousing industries have seen their employment nearly double between 2008 and 2019 as the region has positioned itself as a growing logistics and manufacturing center given its surface transportation links and air cargo services at FAT.

Table 2: NAICS Employment in the Fresno-Madera-Hanford CSA (sorted by employment in nonfarm private sectors in 2019)

| Industry Sector | 2008 | 2015 | 2019 | Change 2008-19 | |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|------------|
| | | | | # | % |
| Farm Employment | 29,018 | 28,777 | 26,809 | (2,209) | -8% |
| Private Nonfarm Employment | 426,833 | 469,891 | 519,923 | 93,090 | 22% |
| Health care and social assistance | 56,244 | 79,654 | 92,882 | 36,638 | 65% |
| Retail trade | 54,482 | 56,656 | 57,772 | 3,290 | 6% |
| Forestry, fishing, and related activities | (D) | (D) | 44,962 | -- | -- |
| Accommodation and food services | 32,627 | 36,811 | 42,108 | 9,481 | 29% |
| Manufacturing | 36,970 | 36,188 | 36,702 | (268) | -1% |
| Administrative and support services | 26,925 | 32,448 | 32,850 | 5,925 | 22% |
| Transportation and warehousing | 16,741 | 20,057 | 32,123 | 15,382 | 92% |
| Construction | 28,340 | 24,154 | 29,088 | 748 | 3% |
| Finance and insurance | 20,952 | 20,269 | 23,985 | 3,033 | 14% |
| Professional, scientific, and technical services | (D) | 21,917 | 23,725 | -- | -- |
| Real estate and rental and leasing | 18,526 | 19,847 | 21,807 | 3,281 | 18% |
| Wholesale trade | 16,685 | 19,246 | 19,173 | 2,488 | 15% |
| Arts, entertainment, and recreation | 6,780 | 7,233 | 8,382 | 1,602 | 24% |
| Educational services | 6,161 | 6,392 | 6,660 | 499 | 8% |
| Management of companies and enterprises | (D) | 2,833 | 3,349 | -- | -- |
| Utilities | 2,274 | 2,637 | 2,671 | 397 | 17% |
| Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction | (D) | (D) | 650 | -- | -- |
| All other private sector | 118,341 | 102,644 | 62,746 | (55,595) | -47% |
| Government and government enterprises | 104,266 | 99,264 | 109,197 | 4,931 | 5% |
| Total employment | 560,117 | 597,932 | 655,929 | 95,812 | 17% |

Source: BEA

Notes: (D) = data suppressed to protect confidentiality. As a result, “--” indicates that changes cannot be calculated. “All other private sector” summarizes employment in sectors with fewer than 10,000 employees. It also includes employment in sectors where data were suppressed.

Furthermore, recent expansion of food processing, packaging, wholesaling, and agri-food manufacturing businesses in the region are building upon the core agricultural base of the region with higher value-added processes, bringing higher compensated employment to the region. Since 2008, the number of establishments³ in the CMA grew from just fewer than 33,800 in 2008 to more than 42,000 in 2019 – a growth of 8,200 establishments or a 24 percent growth in just 11 years. This demonstrates the region’s

³ Defined as individual physical locations where business is done. An individual company may have multiple locations under a single business, so this metric measures more broadly expansion of business activity within the region.

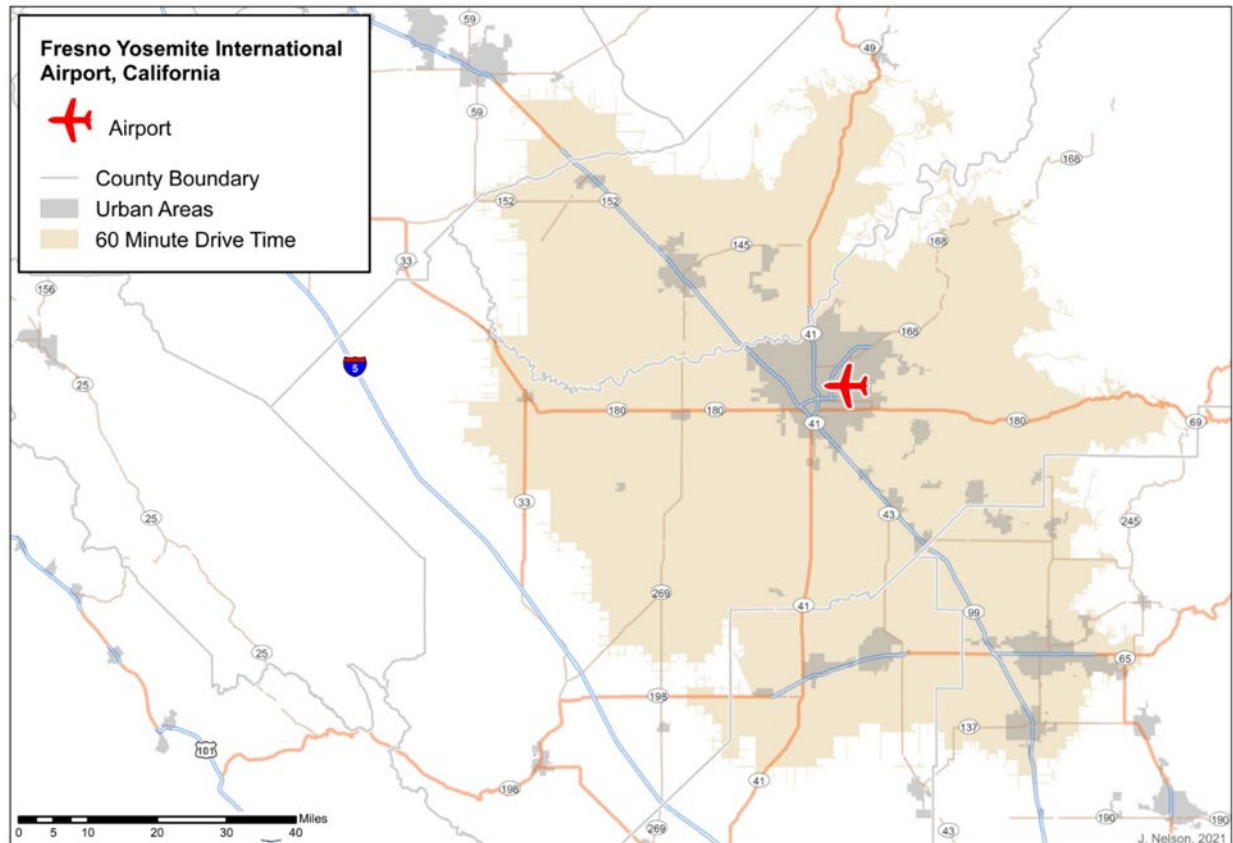


recovery from the impacts of the Great Recession in 2008/09 and, coupled with the growth in non-agriculture and service sector jobs, the diversification of the economy in the CMA.

Drive Time Analysis

Another alternative for examining the region's economic base is to visualize business activity within a certain driving distance from the airport. Figure 2 illustrates a 60-minute drive time around FAT.

Figure 2: FAT and the Geographic Region Within a 60-Minute Drive



Key highlights of socio-economic activity within the 60-minute drive of the airport:

- The total estimated 2019 population was 1.53 million. Of that, about 920,000 (60 percent) were considered “working age” (between the ages of 18 and 64).
- The region supported nearly 47,000 businesses employing nearly 524,000. In terms of major industry sectors (defined by NAICS codes), the largest based on total employment was Manufacturing (over 38,000 employees), Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate (“FIRE”) with nearly 30,000, followed by and Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (PST), with over 22,000.
- About 20 percent of the total population over the age of 25 held college degrees. This includes 13.3 percent with a Bachelor’s degree and another 6.6 percent with a Graduate or Professional degree.



Economic Clusters

The U.S. Cluster Mapping Project’s analysis of the Fresno region also highlights its broad economic strength. A cluster is a concentration of related industries in a particular region. Clusters consist of companies, suppliers, and service providers, as well as government agencies and other institutions that provide specialized training and education, information, research, and technical support. *Traded clusters* are groups of related industries that serve markets beyond the region in which they are located and therefore require some form of transport connectivity. Examples include financial service or information technology. By contrast, *local clusters* consist of industries that serve the local market. Examples include local grocery stores or restaurants.¹⁰

The Cluster Mapping Project’s analysis is based on MSAs or broad geographic “economic areas.” The Fresno economic region has strong economic clusters in eight areas: Three are closely affiliated with the region’s agricultural base: Agricultural Inputs and Services, Food Processing, and Livestock. In addition, the region has strength in Distribution and eCommerce, Paper and Packaging, Performing Arts, Communications, and Environmental Services.

- Agricultural Inputs and Services. The region is ranked 3rd nationally in this cluster (out of 179 total economic areas). Subsectors include agricultural services (ranked 3rd in U.S. out of 179 economic areas) and farm management and labor services (ranked 2nd in the U.S.) The region is also ranked in the top 50 for Fertilizer subsector. The region’s specialization (Location Quotient) is 22.29.
- Food processing and manufacturing. The Fresno economic area is ranked 14th in the U.S. and has an LQ of 6.82. The Fresno region ranks in the top 10 nationally in several subsectors, including packaged fruit and vegetables, dairy products, and wineries. It is in the top 50 nationally in specialty food and ingredients, baked goods, animal foods, and soft drinks and ice.
- Livestock processing. The region is ranked 26th in the U.S. and has an LQ of 5.28.

The only other cluster with significant levels of employment is Distribution and eCommerce, with over 21,000 employed.⁴ The region is ranked 40th in the U.S. and has an LQ of 1.37. Subsectors include wholesale of food products (ranked 21st), wholesale of farm products and supplies (22nd), sale of farm and garden machinery (15th), and warehousing and storage (58th).

A 2018 study of the impact of the airport on the local economy highlighted the transition of the regional economy from a primarily agricultural based economy in the 1990s to a specialized “agricultural manufacturing cluster” as a sign of the region’s economic growth and diversification.⁵ While the region has a high proportion of farm workers and farm employment, compared to state and national averages, farm employment has seen declines over the 2008 to 2019 period while manufacturing and service-sector employment is on the rise. Even though farm employment is on a declining trend, average wages in the agricultural sector have seen a significant rise since the Great Recession. Both trends are reflective

⁴ Total regional employment in the other noted traded clusters were less than 2,500: Performing Arts (2,200), Paper and Packaging (2,100), Communications Equipment and Services (1,600), and Environmental Services (700).

⁵ Fresno County Economic Development Corporation, *Descriptive Analysis of The Structure of the Fresno-Madera Economy: How the Regional Economy Impacts Air-Traffic Demand*, March 2018.



of increasing automation in the agricultural sector, which has carry-over impacts in supporting services supporting the agriculture industry in the region.

Overview of the Airport and its Services

Fresno Yosemite International Airport (FAT) is the primary passenger and commercial service for California's central San Joaquin Valley. It is California's 12th largest airport, serving just fewer than 1.9 million passengers in 2019. The Airport is also the closest commercial service airport Yosemite, Sequoia, and Kings Canyon national parks, giving FAT a unique gateway role to a national parks-based tourism in California. The airport is owned and operated by the City of Fresno under the Airports Department within the city government. The City of Fresno also owns and operates Fresno Chandler Executive Airport (FCH) which is a primarily General Aviation airport.

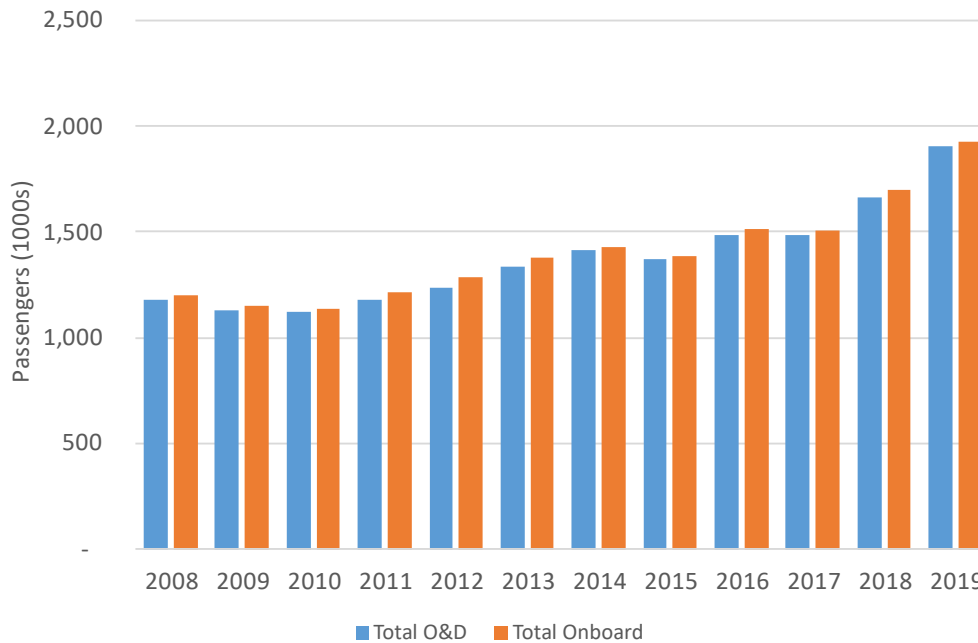
The airport's catchment area includes the Fresno-Madera-Hanford CSA as well as neighboring Tulare, Merced, and Mariposa counties.⁶ Due to its relatively geographically isolated nature in California's Central Valley, FAT does not have any competing commercial service airports within its primary catchment area. The nearest major hub airports are San Francisco (SFO) and Los Angeles (LAX), a minimum three and four-hour drive time, respectively, though both cities feature significant road congestion that may lead to longer driving times. Other medium hub airports such as Sacramento (SMF), Oakland (OAK), and San Jose (SJC) provide limited competition as the primary competition away from FAT is for international services at LAX and SFO.

Although connecting itineraries are possible, the airport primarily serves a market that originates its travel there or is destined for the airport. Consequently, a high percentage of passenger traffic is "origin and destination" traffic. Figure 3 shows the changes in total onboard (enplaned and deplaned) passengers and total O&D passengers at Fresno from 2008-2019. By 2019, total O&D traffic at the airport had grown to more than 1.9 million passengers, growing at a compound annual rate of 4.4 percent per annum.

⁶ Fresno Yosemite International Airport, *Master Plan Update 2018*.



Figure 3: Changes in Total and O&D Passenger Activity 2008-2019 (1000s)

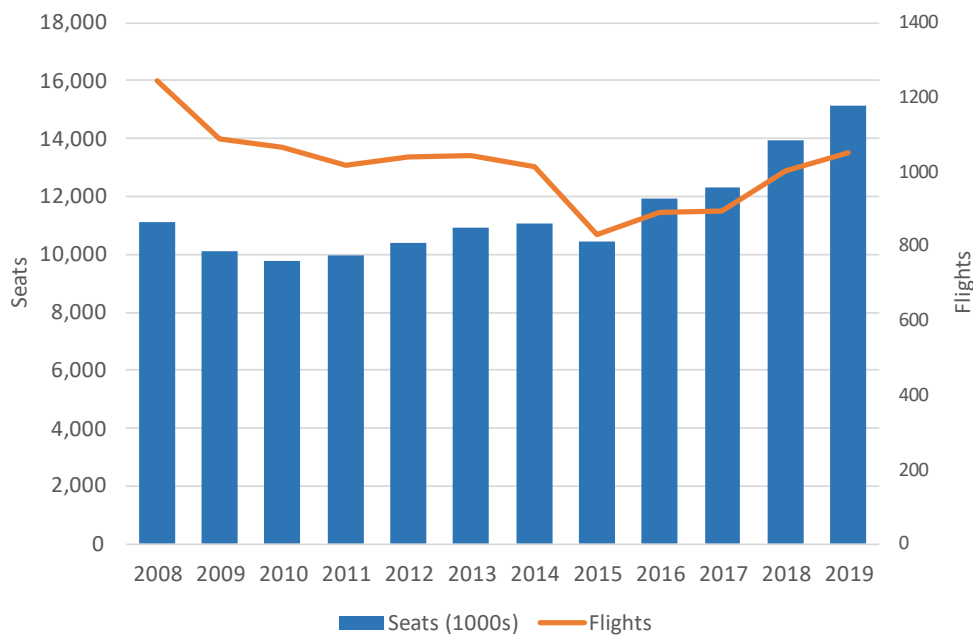


Source: Sabre (O&D estimates) and T-100 data via Cirium – Diiio.

Total capacity at FAT has recovered notably since 2015. Following the Great Recession, airlines dropped a significant number of flights and available seats at the airport. From 2008 through 2011, carriers dropped almost 20 percent of flights but 10 percent of seat capacity. Carriers dropped capacity again from 2014 to 2015, when airlines again removed 18 percent of flight operations but only 6 percent of seat capacity. From 2008 through 2015, average aircraft size (available seat capacity) at FAT rose from 54 to 76. Since then, however, airlines have returned flight activity nearly back to 2010 levels and offered a record number of available seats. Figure 4 summarizes the changes in flights and seats.



Figure 4: Changes in Capacity Offered 2008-2019



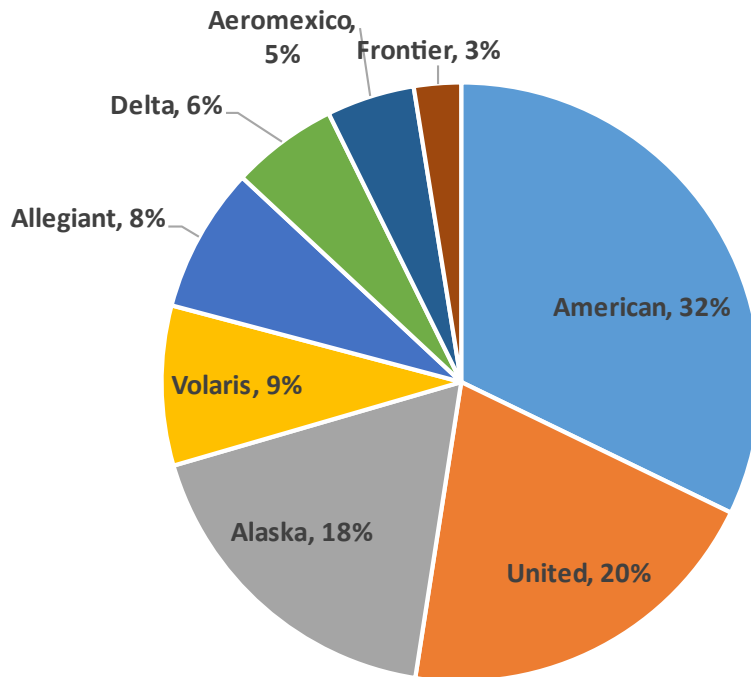
Source: T-100 data from Diio - Cirium

Classified by the FAA as a small hub primary commercial service airport, in 2019, FAT was served by a diverse set of scheduled carriers operating at the airport including network carriers (American, United, Alaska, and Delta), foreign carriers (Volaris, Aeromexico), and ultra low-cost carriers (Allegiant, Frontier). Network carriers carry over 75 percent of the total traffic. (Southwest entered the Fresno market in 2021.)

Seven of the top ten non-stop destinations served at FAT in 2019 by seat capacity were large hub airports (e.g., LAX, SFO, DFW), which provided one-stop connectivity to/from Fresno and Central California to a multitude of destinations in the U.S. and around the world. In addition to connectivity to airports in the U.S., FAT had non-stop service to two destinations in Mexico. Non-stop service by two Mexican carriers highlights the important economic and cultural ties between the region and Mexico.



Figure 5: FAT Seat Capacity Share by Airline, 2019



Since 2015, FAT experienced significant increases in service to major hubs. Compared to 2015, the number of annual (2019) flights increased by

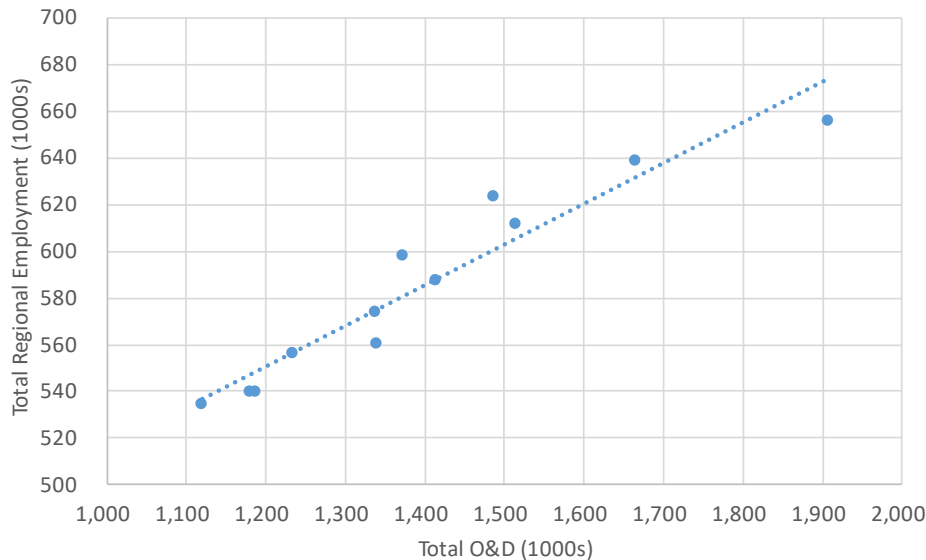
- Over 180 to Denver
- Over 200 to Dallas-Ft. Worth International
- 363 to Guadalajara (on AeroMexico)
- 234 to Las Vegas
- Almost 600 to Los Angeles International
- 135 to Morelia International Airport (on Volaris)
- 260 to Chicago O'Hare
- 350 to Phoenix Sky Harbor International
- 335 to San Diego
- 94 to Seattle
- 147 to San Francisco
- Almost 100 to Salt Lake City

Analysis of Changes in Employment and Air Service

FAT's O&D traffic is highly correlated with total regional employment. Figure 6 summarizes how changes in total O&D traffic have aligned with changes in regional employment. The line indicates a basic relationship between the two. As total employment increases, total O&D increases. The correlation coefficient between the two is 0.915. The chart does not demonstrate causation; that is, it is not evident whether rising total employment levels leads to more air traffic, or whether more air traffic leads to more total employment.



Figure 6: Relationship between Regional Employment and O&D Traffic, 2008-2019



Connectivity Analysis

High quality transportation – of all modes – is a prerequisite for sustained economic growth and competitiveness for a region. Specifically, these factors of economic development are driven by productivity growth which is underpinned by trade, foreign investment, and innovative activity – all of which are facilitated by connectivity. “Connectivity” generally means the ability to reach a wide range of places in a short amount of time. Connectivity is not simply a matter of the number of routes or number of frequencies operated. Connectivity is fundamentally about access to markets and regions. As FAT is the primary commercial service airport within the CSA then changes in connectivity out of the Airport can have notable impacts on how quickly and conveniently Fresno and the Central Valley area can be reached, or how local residents can access outbound markets.

Connectivity can be quantitatively measured in a variety of ways; the figure below summarizes the growth in connectivity at FAT between 2008 and 2019 using a method developed by the International Air Transport Association (IATA). The IATA connectivity index estimates the quality of air service at an airport based on the degree of service to other airports with the largest and most diverse route networks, as a proxy for how accessible the local economy is to the rest of the world.⁷ The change in

⁷ The IATA connectivity index measures the number and size of destinations served, as well as the frequency of service to each destination and the number of onward connections available from those destinations. Service to airports with the highest total seat capacity (e.g. ATL) receive the highest weighting. Thus, the index recognises that connections to major global gateways provide greater global connectivity than connections to the same number of spoke ends.

The formula for the index is calculated as follows:

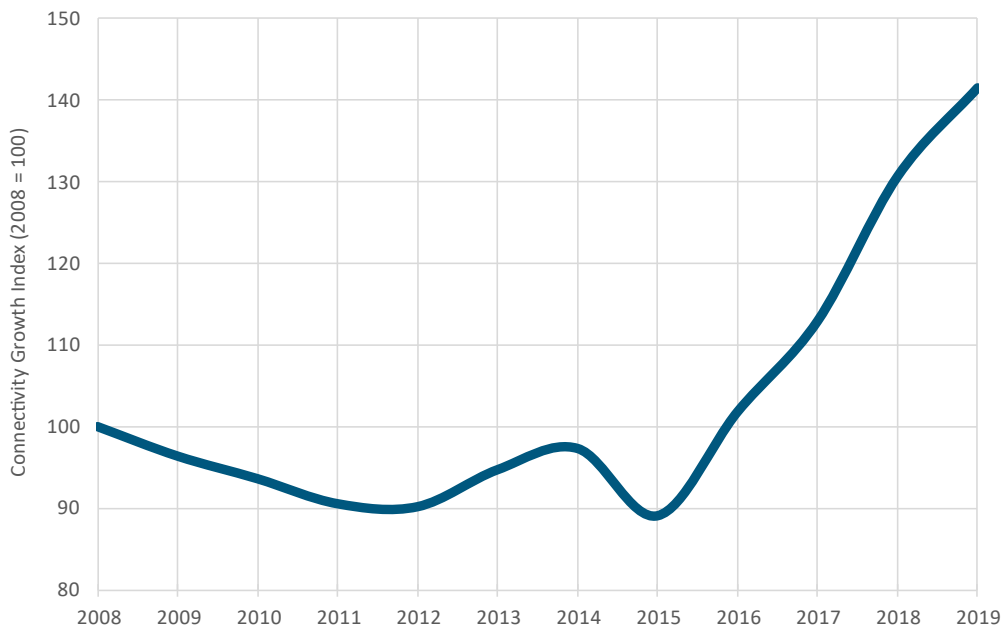
$$\frac{[\text{Number of destinations} \times \text{Weekly Frequency} \times \text{Seats per flight}]}{\text{Weighted by the Size of the Destination Airport}} \div \text{Scalar factor of 1000}$$



FAT's connectivity index or score is charted below, by indexing the score against 2008 levels for comparison.

Connectivity at FAT in 2019 was 42 percent higher than connectivity in 2008. While the airport did experience a dip in connectivity between 2008 and 2015, largely due to the declines in seat capacity seen over that period, since 2015 the airport has seen a strong growth in connectivity. In particular, the connectivity growth has exceeded seat capacity growth as the bulk of capacity added at the airport since 2015 has been to major national hubs such as LAX, DFW, SFO, DEN and the addition of ORD. All else being equal, each additional seat serving routes to major hubs will yield a higher level of connectivity than capacity growth at smaller airports with fewer, if any, onward connecting opportunities and services. This is why connectivity at FAT grew by 60 percent between 2015 and 2019 while seat capacity grew by 45 percent over the same period. Growth in capacity to Guadalajara (GLD) also provides an important boost to FAT's connectivity score, both as an international destination with key economic and socio-cultural links to the Fresno region, but as a hub and focus city for Volaris and Aeromexico, respectively, providing one-stop access to many destinations in Mexico.

Figure 7: FAT Connectivity Growth Index (2008=100)



Note: Chart shows the IATA Connectivity Index for FAT, indexed against 2008 (2008 = 100).

Source: InterVISTAS analysis of Innovata schedule data from Diio Mi.

In 2021, Southwest Airlines added scheduled service from FAT to Las Vegas and Denver, and Volaris added service to Mexico City and Leon/Guanajuato. Both of those changes would further improve connectivity.

Communicating the Airport's Economic Impact

California's aviation industry provides a major source of economic activity throughout the state. The aviation sector provides direct and indirect economic benefit with activity closely associated with aviation activity, including commercial passenger service, air cargo, general aviation, government and



military activities. Importantly, the aviation industry and aviation activity provide connectivity and access for people and goods that propel economic resilience and vibrance.

The recent *California Aviation System Plan (CASP)* draft report in 2020 noted that the aviation industry contributed an estimated \$33 billion dollars in economic activity and more than 148,000 jobs to the State's economy.⁸ Commercial aviation activity in the state was estimated to be responsible for \$177 billion in economic output and responsible for 1.5 million jobs in the state resulting from commercial activity at California's primary service commercial airports.⁹

In a 2018 economic impact study, FAT was estimated to have generated an overall economic output of more than \$426 million from the airport alone.¹⁰ Combined with the city-run Chandler Executive Airport and airport-associated visitor and real estate activities, the city's aviation activity was estimated at more than \$788 million in overall economic contribution. Economic impacts in the region were highly driven by the commercial and air cargo activity taking place at FAT.

The growing urbanization and focus on government, services, and professional employment in the CSA highlights the importance of air passenger and air cargo links at FAT. Air connectivity at FAT is also important in supporting the region's agriculture sector by providing non-stop air links to key source locations for temporary agricultural workers from Mexico.

The airport uses its economic impact study in its marketing material, messaging to stakeholders, elected officials at all levels (Federal, State, County and Local), and in discussions our federal partners such as TSA, Customs and Border Protection, FAA and the Department of Defense. The airport manager also noted that it helps the airport staff better understand the economic impact of each enplaning passenger and flight in the market area.

Stakeholders Perspectives on Contributions of Air Service

The interests of the business community and economic development authority in the region are represented by the Fresno County Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and the Fresno Chamber of Commerce. Commercial air service is extremely important to both. The Fresno EDC is an organization responsible for bringing in new business to the county. The Fresno Chamber works to promote and support the success of the regional business community through effective advocacy, education and relationship building. The airport also works closely with the Visalia Chamber of Commerce, which is supportive of its air service development initiatives.

These organizations note how the Greater Fresno area's economy is diversifying and changing. The metro region is growing measurably in the logistics and technology field. Some of the key industries in the Fresno area are manufacturing, healthcare, and agriculture. There is a strong international traveler base in the agricultural industry, with frequent China, Japan, Germany, and Spain as it relates to what is being manufactured in the region.

⁸ Caltrans, *California Aviation System Plan 2020 Preliminary Draft*.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ City of Fresno Airports Department, *The Economic Impact of Fresno Yosemite International and Chandler Executive Airport*, 2018.



The Fresno EDC President & CEO travels extensively. Access to Chicago, Atlanta, New York, and Washington is critically important. International business is also extremely important for trade and efforts to attract international businesses to relocate to the region. In April 2021, the community succeeded in convincing Southwest to enter the market, an effort that took 10-15 years. The EDC believes that the new service will not only help domestic connectivity but be beneficial in discussions with business site selectors about the region's accessibility. The EDC would also like a nonstop flight from FAT to the east coast to improve connectivity.

Community stakeholders have embraced regional economic development in California's Central Valley. Historically, communities there have not had a collective voice as strong as areas in northern and southern California. Now, however, with close to 5 million people in the Central Valley and with Fresno being the 5th largest city in the state, the region is working together to express their needs, especially on transportation matters.

The Fresno EDC has had a close working relationship with FAT for many years. The airport staff will reach out to the EDC to discuss goals (e.g., potential target destinations for new nonstop flights) and what information are they hearing from clients.

When reviewing economic impact as it relates to FAT, economic impact studies of Fresno and Madeira counties were performed. The Fresno EDC looks at population growth, industry growth and the economy of the region. Air quality is also a big concern. International trade has moved up the list. In partnership with the Department of Social Services, the EDC works directly with businesses to create and provide customized training programs and cost saving incentives to local businesses to help meet their hiring needs.

The regional economic goals are tied to transportation and aviation. Roads, rail, and air are the three main things the region must address together to improve Greater Fresno.