

# SkyWest proposal for Barkley flights may benefit cancer patients

New flights to Houston would ease travel to MD Anderson for many in west Kentucky

**BY DRAYTON CHARLTON-PERRIN**  
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MCCRACKEN COUNTY — SkyWest’s proposal to provide airline services at Barkley Regional Airport could benefit local cancer patients.

The airport authority board announced Tuesday that it will recommend SkyWest’s proposed contract to take over services through the federal Essential Air Service program once its contract with Contour Airlines ends. If approved by the U.S. Department of Transportation, SkyWest would provide 12 round-trip flights per week, including six to Chicago and six to Houston.

Houston is home to one of the most famous cancer treatment centers in the world, MD Anderson Cancer Center. Jay Wommack, who lives in Marshall County, drives his father, Jerry Wommack, to Houston for treatment.

“We dropped him off at MD Anderson on my 50th birthday to start his 30 days of chemotherapy,” Wommack said.

Wommack isn’t alone; many people in west Kentucky travel to MD Anderson for cancer treatment.

“Paducah, Mayfield, southern Illinois, Tennessee, if you have cancer, MD Anderson is the place to go,” Wommack said.

Contour Airlines currently provides flights from Paducah to Charlotte, North Carolina. With no way to fly directly to Texas from west Kentucky, Wommack said he has had to make many sacrifices to get his father to Houston.

“Most of the time we drive. We started flying since dad’s gotten better. But to drive takes 13 hours and to fly takes a drive to Nashville and about two [or] two-and-a-half hours direct flight to Houston,” Wommack said.

In addition to time, the trip costs a lot of money.



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**Barkley Regional Airport is seen from its air traffic control tower.**



Contributed photo  
**Jerry Wommack was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia five years ago. He receives treatment at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston.**

“It’s expensive, you know, [with] gas, wear and tear, your time, parking, hotel stays,” Wommack said.

Wommack said he hopes the SkyWest proposal will be approved soon, so he can tell his dad the good news. He said he knows many other people in the region will be happy to hear it, too.

“Unfortunately, we aren’t the only family that has to go to Houston in this area,” Wommack said. “It’s going to make a lot of people’s lives easier that have to fly out that way.”

Barkley Regional Airport expects to receive an answer from the Department of Transportation within the next 30 to 60 days on whether SkyWest’s proposal has been approved.

If approved, Barkley Regional Airport will offer flights to more than one major airline hub at a time.

The airport has opened a community petition to gather support for its recommendation of SkyWest’s proposal. The petition can be found online at <https://chnng.it/KpB-VMGnZSS>.

# Barkley Regional chooses SkyWest for new airline contract

Carrier to provide flights to Chicago, Houston

**BY CARLY DICK**  
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WEST PADUCAH — The Barkley Regional Airport Authority Board is recommending SkyWest be awarded a contract to provide air carrier services in West Paducah under the federal Essential Air Service program, with flights to George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, Texas, and Chicago O’Hare International Airport in Illinois.

If approved by the U.S. Department of Transportation, the new deal will mark the first time Barkley Regional Airport will provide flights to two destination hubs at once since joining the Essential Air Service program. Additionally, SkyWest is a partner of United Airlines, meaning United Airlines Mileage-Plus members will earn points from flights out of Barkley Regional Airport.

Barkley Regional Airport Executive Director Dennis Rouleau said bookings will open in September, and SkyWest flights will start the first week of December.

In addition to the two destinations, the contract includes a new aircraft, the CRJ 550. SkyWest originally proposed a CRJ 200 aircraft, the same one used by the airport’s current carrier, Contour Airlines. Rouleau said, through negotiations, SkyWest was willing to provide a “better, newer airplane.”

Rouleau said while both aircraft have 50 seats, the CRJ 550 will have more room and will be reliable.

“The CRJ 200, you know, we’ve experienced them here...some of the problems we’ve had is maintenance issues. We wanted a newer, more reliable aircraft,” he said. “So, it kind of checks off that box about...trying to have more reliable service out of here.”

Additionally, customers will be able to choose between first class, economy plus and economy seats.

“The CRJ 550 product, it’s much roomier and...it’s just a better product, and it’s a better project to complement our brand-new terminal,” Rouleau said.

McCracken County Judge Executive Craig Clymer said one of the major considerations when making the decision on carriers was where the public was most frequently flying.

“I think the greatest thing that we could do — had a hard-working team put all this together, great consultant — [is] we took information from the public [asking] ‘Where do you want to go? What do you want to do?’ and put it all together and compiled it, going with SkyWest,” Clymer said.

The contract with SkyWest would be for four years. The carrier also agreed to buy fuel from Barkley Regional Airport.

Luke Schmidt, president of L.B. Schmidt & Associates, worked with the Barkley Regional Airport Authority Board as a consultant throughout the process. He said the contract with SkyWest will allow people in McCracken County and the surrounding region to travel more than



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**The Barkley Regional Airport Authority Board is recommending SkyWest for its next airline contract, with flights to George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston, Texas, and Chicago O’Hare International Airport in Illinois.**



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**SkyWest is offering a CRJ 550 aircraft, which has 50 seats. First class, economy plus and economy seats will be available to customers.**



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**The Barkley Regional Airport Authority Board considered where the public was most frequently flying when deciding which airline to choose.**

270 destinations with one connecting flight.

“The one word to think about is connectivity. It’s not just flying to Chicago, it’s not just flying to Houston,” Schmidt said. “Starting in December, [you] can make one connection and be in Sydney, Australia, the next time you get off the plane, or Tokyo, London, Washington D.C., Los Angeles...This puts Paducah on the map.”

SkyWest rescinded its previous contract offer with Barkley Regional Airport more than four years ago due to a pilot shortage. Schmidt said the airport authority board has been assured that will not happen with this contract.

“SkyWest has totally remedied the issue that led to the shortage of

pilots to the point now where they’re adding markets back,” he said. “This was one...they really wanted to get back. This was one of their better markets, and they realized this was the first opportunity to do that.”

The Barkley Regional Airport Authority Board’s recommendation to accept SkyWest as the new carrier will now go to the Department of Transportation to be approved.

## NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

The Public Service Commission of Kentucky issued an order on March 13, 2025, scheduling a hearing to be held on August 4, 2025, at 9 a.m., Eastern Daylight Time, in the Richard Raff Hearing Room at the offices of the Public Service Commission located at 211 Sower Boulevard in Frankfort, Kentucky, for Case No. 2025-00045. This is an examination of the Electronic Application of Kentucky Utilities Company and Louisville Gas and Electric Company for Certificates of Public Convenience and Necessity and Site Compatibility Certificates.

This hearing will be streamed live and may be viewed on the PSC website, [psc.ky.gov](https://psc.ky.gov).

Public comments may be made at the beginning of the hearing. Those wishing to make oral public comments may do so by following the instructions listed on the PSC website, [psc.ky.gov](https://psc.ky.gov).

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