

# MITRE Air Traffic Update: State-by-State Differences

March 2021



## The Pandemic's Impact on Air Travel Varies by State

As people in the U.S. and around the world have reduced unnecessary travel to avoid catching or spreading COVID-19, commercial airlines are operating fewer flights than they were before the pandemic. Looking at commercial flights operating at airports in the contiguous United States, the overall number of daily operations (e.g., arrivals and departures) during February 2021 was 62% of the same month in 2020.<sup>1</sup> These changes, however, are not uniform across the country.

Figure 1 shows the state-by-state percentages of daily operations in February 2021 compared with February 2020. The darker shading indicates those states with a higher share of their pre-pandemic traffic. We can see that many states in the Southeast and Northwest have kept proportionally more flights than other areas. For example, flights ranged from 39% of last year's traffic in New York to over 100% in Wyoming.

Figure 2, on the other hand, shows the overall number of passenger flights during February 2021. Darker shading on this map indicates those states with a higher number of commercial operations.

**The pandemic has disproportionately impacted air traffic in California, Nevada, and the Northeast.**

**Southern and Northwestern states have kept a relatively larger share of their commercial flights.**

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<sup>1</sup> **Source:** Average daily operations by Air Carrier and Air Taxi flights, as reported by the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA's) OPSNET data.

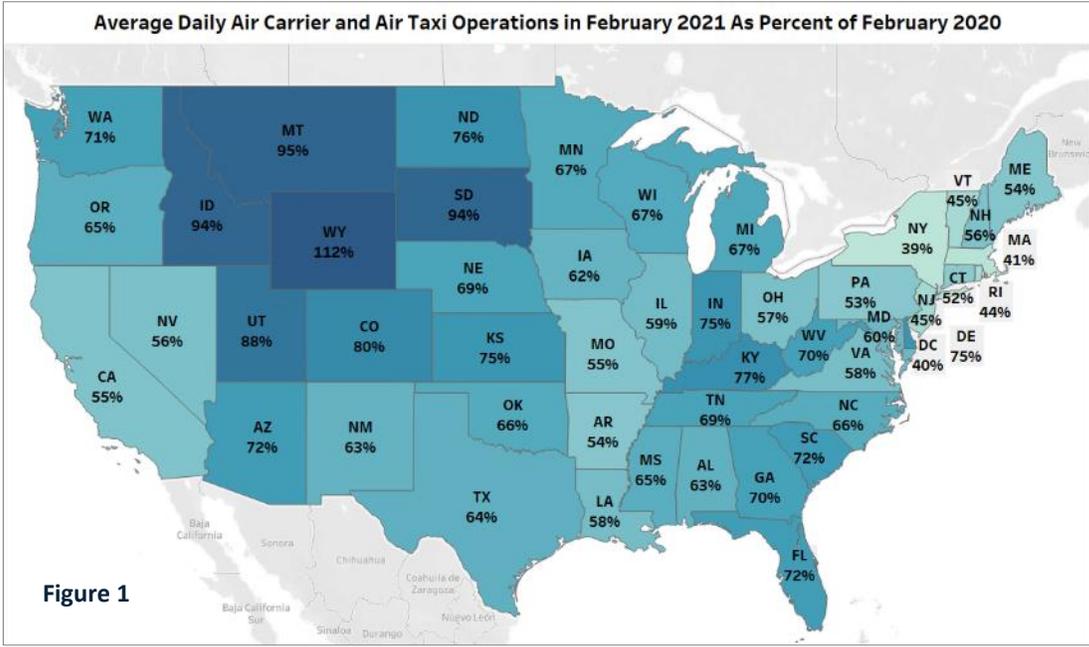


Figure 1

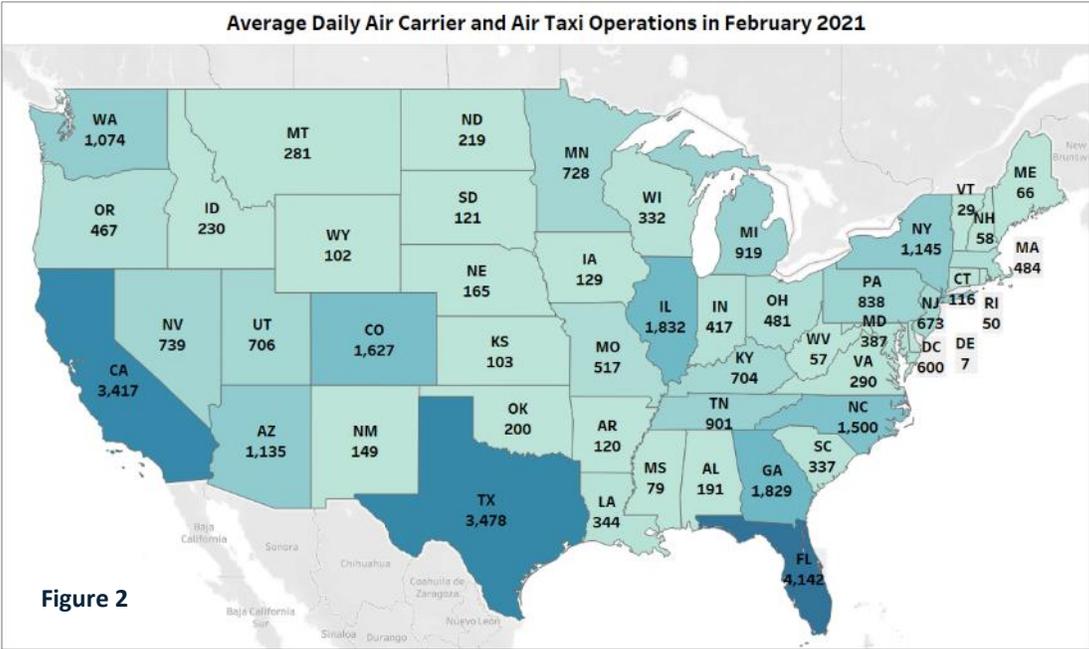


Figure 2

The maps in Figure 1 and Figure 2 combined show that while some states are seeing levels of commercial traffic as low as half of pre-pandemic levels, they nevertheless continue to rank quite high nationally in their overall number of flights. California, for example, while only seeing 55% of its usual traffic in February 2021, ranked third nationally in number of flights that month, just behind Florida and Texas.

There are likely many reasons for these local and regional differences. While a thorough analysis is beyond the scope of this Air Traffic Update, we hope you find this view of the data as thought provoking as we do.

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