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Fitch: Improved U.S. Airport Medians Support Numerous Rating Upgrades

Fitch Ratings-New York/Austin/San Francisco-09 February 2026: The U.S. airport sector has remained resilient through economic and airline industry challenges. This resilience is reflected in strong median financial metrics for general airport revenue bonds (GARB), highlighted in Fitch Ratings' latest peer review, which have outperformed pre-pandemic fiscal 2019 levels. Improved leverage, revenue generation, and liquidity have led to multiple rating upgrades and Outlook revisions across all Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) hub sizes in Fitch's rated portfolio over the last two years.

Fitch's primary rating metric for U.S. municipal airports, leverage, improved on a point-in-time basis. Net debt to cash flow available for debt service fell to 3.7x in fiscal 2024 from 4.0x in fiscal 2019. Leverage also improved on a forward-looking year-five basis, to 2.4x from 3.6x. Leverage declined across all hub sizes, with the large hub point-in-time metric dropping the most, to 5.2x from 6.7x. Airports have benefited from continued amortization of outstanding debt, more time to complete volume-driven projects, lower infrastructure wear and tear, and operating efficiencies from completing typically disruptive maintenance projects during the pandemic travel lull. Together with stronger revenue, airline use and lease agreements (AULs), and liquidity, these factors have helped alleviate post-pandemic and inflationary pressures on capital plans.

Portfolio-wide, the fiscal 2024 median for enplanements is slightly below the fiscal 2019 median. However, this reflects shifts in Fitch's rated public finance portfolio. The median for large hubs rose to nearly 26 million enplanements in fiscal 2024 from almost 24 million in fiscal 2019. The median for medium hubs rose to 5.2 million from 5.0 million, while the median for small hubs was largely flat. Small hubs are generally more vulnerable to airlines' scheduling and route changes and tend to be more regionally focused, with greater exposure to low-cost and ultra-low-cost carriers compared with large hubs. Large hubs typically serve primary markets with higher wealth and strong origin/destination demand which underpins higher airline yields. Large hubs can also support aircraft upgauging to funnel more passengers through fewer flights, and some may serve as connecting airports, boosting demand.

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