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Spirit Airlines announces Atlantic City-Boston service

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Starting May 1, travelers don't have to travel just south out of Atlantic City International Airport.

Spirit Airlines announced Tuesday that it will begin daily service between Atlantic City International in Egg Harbor Township and Boston on that date.

The approximately 90-minute flights will leave Boston for Atlantic City International at 10:40 a.m. and leave Atlantic City International for Boston at 5:20 p.m.

The flights mark the first success of a first-time coalition of state agencies, gaming companies and elected officials to lure new airlines with new destinations - and potential new customers to bolster Atlantic City's sagging casino industry - to Atlantic City International.

Boston was one of the cities targeted by the coalition. The group also is targeting Chicago, Atlanta and other cities east of the Mississippi River by offering incentives that include some waived airport fees, marketing help and access to convention and meeting planning.

Some of those new incentives also were announced Tuesday: Tropicana Casino and Resort, Harrah's Resort, Caesars Atlantic City, Bally's Atlantic City, Showboat Casino Hotel and a non-casino hotel, The Chelsea, are offering special packages to Spirit customers.

The increased involvement by the casino companies is something that officials with the South Jersey Transportation Authority, or SJTA, which operates the airport, have considered crucial for the airport's future success.

Involvement by the casinos is apparently being driven by economics: The industry is in the worst financial slump in its three-decade history, with gaming revenues tumbling 6.6 percent to \$3.9 billion in the first 10 months of the year. The goal is to bring in more customers by air to offset the loss of customers who are driving to other gaming destinations in nearby states.

"There has been an obvious need to revisit the drive market, which has been changing," SJTA spokeswoman Sharon Gordon said.

Regardless of why the casinos have joined the effort to bolster Atlantic City International, Gordon said, "It's the first time in I don't know how long that I've seen a group of competitors coming together and working toward a common goal."

SJTA Executive Director Bart Mueller said, "Passengers who enjoy the ease of convenience of the Atlantic City International Airport will now have direct service to Boston and the New England

region without having the hassle of traveling through the surrounding metro airports."

Spirit is offering \$9 introductory fares through today as part of the new Boston service.

More information can be found at

www.spiritair.com.

E-mail Thomas Barlas:

TBarlas@pressofac.com

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