

Alaska Airlines Alters Course on Flight Schedule



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A new schedule for the final flight of the day into the Walla Walla Regional Airport has been changed before an initial plan ever even got off the ground.

Starting in March the last flight will depart Seattle at 8:15 p.m. — 45 minutes later than the current schedule but nearly three hours earlier than a schedule revision carrier Alaska Airlines had initially planned, said World Wide Travel owner and Walla Walla Air Travel Coalition member Paul Schneidmiller on Tuesday.

The current flight leaves Seattle at 7:30 p.m. and lands here at 8:25 p.m. In December, the airline changed the flight schedule to start in March so that the last flight would leave Seattle at 11 p.m.

The new revision is considered a compromise between what Alaska had at first planned and what air travel advocates believe will work best for the community, he said.

The 9:10 p.m. arrival time in Walla Walla will keep a “reasonably good” schedule for business travelers making day trips to the west side of the state while still providing additional connections for those coming into Walla Walla from other areas, he said.

The later time change was discovered in December when Schneidmiller stumbled upon the information while booking a flight for a client.

Met with mixed reactions from local residents on social media, the change was a huge concern for air travel advocates for a couple of reasons. One: The airline didn't notify local officials, who have worked to land a federal grant and spend over a two-year period about \$300,000 marketing the airline and the local airport in an effort to bolster and save service. Two: The late flight could have negatively impacted the number of visitors flying in for the weekend, and the number of business travelers making day trips, if they couldn't get to the community until the proposed 11:50 p.m. arrival.

Members of the Walla Walla Air Travel Coalition — which includes the Port, airport, local business, tourism and travel industry representatives and frequent flyers — reached out to the airline to ask for reconsideration.

Alaska Network Planning Director Ben Munson confirmed to Schneidmiller via email the new time change will be visible in the Alaska system Jan. 12.

“From a visitor’s standpoint we’re appreciative that Alaska is trying to make the schedule work for local citizens and for folks that come to visit Walla Walla for tourism-related activities,” Tourism Walla Walla Executive Director Ron Peck said.

The change from the current 7:30 p.m. flight from Seattle appears to be temporary, with a March 9 start that runs at least through June 7.