



Pittsburgh International passenger traffic and costs

Introduction: In 2024, Pittsburgh International Airport (PIT) enjoyed a significant boost in passengers over the 2023 level, owing largely to Frontier Airlines and an ongoing recovery from the COVID decline of 2020. However, through July 2025, airport reports show the passenger count is down 70,120 (-1.2 percent) from the same seven-month total in 2024.

At the same time, Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) national checkpoint passenger data show a slightly smaller decline (-0.4 percent) for the first seven months in 2025 compared to 2024. Checkpoint data does not count connecting passengers, making it a useful comparison to PIT since it no longer has significant numbers of connecting flyers.

So far in 2025, PIT passenger counts (based on airport reporting) have been lower for five of the seven months through July compared to the same period in 2024. Only January and April posted increases. June's decline of 3.7 percent and July's 3 percent drop have been quite large, totaling 69,694 passengers compared to the passenger count for the same two months in 2024.

May through October 2024

Bear in mind that the subsidized Frontier Airlines began offering cut-rate prices which took effect in May 2024 and ran through October 2024, after which Frontier canceled flights to two major destinations. During that period, sizable gains in passengers at PIT were recorded each month compared to the 2019 levels, which were the highest annual total of enplanements (data from *transtats.bts.gov*) since 2007. In the six months May through October, PIT posted a pickup of 258,957, and averaged 5 percent gains each month compared to the same months in 2019.

Unfortunately, once the Frontier effect was over, both November and December experienced significant passenger declines from the same months in 2019. In total, the two-month shortfall was a substantial 66,706 passengers. Still, for the full year, the 2024

passenger total was 1.7 percent higher than 2019—the first time in five years the 2019 level had been surpassed.

Looking ahead through October of this year, it is likely the monthly passenger counts will lag significantly behind the 2024 monthly counts. The large increases resulting from Frontier’s discounted flights are unlikely to be repeated. Moreover, national passenger data indicate there may well be a pause in air travel growth this year based on TSA monthly counts compared with the same months in 2024 through July, although there was a slightly higher passenger count in August 2025 compared to August 2024.

International passengers

In the last six years, PIT’s annual international passenger counts have been significantly lower than the level reached in 2018. According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, PIT’s international enplanements in 2024 were 20.2 percent lower than the level posted in 2018. PIT’s own data showed total international passengers (including deplanements) were down 21.8 percent over the same period.

Meanwhile, PIT’s data, available through July 2025, put the year-to-date total of international passengers at 140,279—a significant decline (22.7 percent) from the same period in 2018. In 2024 the seven-month decline from 2018 was 25 percent, so there has been a marginal gain in 2025.

Unfortunately, even with British Airways beginning daily scheduled flights, and subsidies having been given to other international carriers, the pre-pandemic 2019 international passenger count has not yet been reached at PIT.

Operating cost per enplaned passenger

PIT’s operating cost per enplaned passenger in 2023 was quite high compared to other airports as an earlier [Policy Brief](#) demonstrated. In 2024, the latest annual audited data available, PIT showed slight improvement in lowering per enplaned passenger cost compared to 2023 thanks in part to an 8.2 percent rise in enplanements from the 2023 level (transtats.bts.gov).

PIT’s operating cost—including depreciation—per enplanement, stood at \$47.36 in 2023. In 2024 that cost fell to \$42.59 as enplanements rose and operating costs declined almost 3 percent for the year compared to 2023. Nonetheless, PIT’s expense per enplanement remained very high compared to other airports, including, particularly, Nashville International Airport (BNA).

BNA had operating costs per enplanement of \$19.89 in 2023 before rising a bit to \$23.97 in 2024. In both years, the cost per enplanement was far lower than PIT’s. It is very likely that the other airports in the above-mentioned 2024 *Brief* had much lower costs in 2023, and likely in 2024, than PIT.

A major element in PIT's high cost are the salaries and wages and benefit outlays. In 2024 PIT spent \$84.77 million on employee costs or \$17.08 per enplanement. That amounts to 40 percent of total operating cost. Meanwhile, in 2024, BNA spent \$4.32 on wages and benefits per enplanement or only 25 percent of PIT's employee costs per passenger.

Overall, BNA spent only 59 percent as much as PIT for pay and benefits despite having more than double the enplaning passengers at PIT in 2024.

Conclusion

In 2024 PIT reached its highest level of enplaning passengers since the 2007 tally, falling 13,000 short of that year's total. And 2024's passenger count was 3 percent above the pre-pandemic 2019 level. Nonetheless, enplanements remain 26 percent below the 20-year-ago reading of 2004, the year USAirways closed its PIT hub. Bear in mind, too, that passenger counts had already dropped sharply by 2004 compared to the record year in 1997 when nearly 21 million enplanements and deplanements occurred.

Looking ahead, if the trend established so far (through July) in 2025 continues, the number of passengers will fall well short of the 2024 level. And, with little or no population growth in the Pittsburgh Metro Area, and very weak gains in employment, the airport faces major obstacles in its efforts to increase its passenger count.

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