

# Airport boardings land on high note in 2013



Walla Walla's airport officials say the numbers indicate continued high passenger traffic.

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WALLA WALLA — Local air service in 2013 continued its high flying ways, according to new numbers from carrier Alaska Airlines and the Walla Walla Regional Airport.

The second best year for passenger numbers was closed out with the second best December in the airport's history, said Airport Manager Jennifer Skoglund.

"We definitely had momentum in 2013," Skoglund said this morning.

With a focused marketing campaign to promote air travel in and out of Walla Walla, she expects continued growth in 2014 on the way to what local officials hope will finally stabilize the community's air service for good.

A total of 33,050 paid passengers flew out of Walla Walla in 2013. That was up nearly 4 percent from 2012 when 31,825 people flew out. The only year with a higher tally was 2009, when revenue passengers totaled 33,430, according to the figures provided.

Inbound air traffic was up by a higher margin. The airport reported 33,454 paid passengers landed at the Walla Walla Regional Airport in 2013. That was a 6.1 percent increase from 2012's 31,537 passengers. The highest number came in 2009 at 33,898.

The individual passenger totals aren't the only numbers the airline considers for its flight operations.

An increasing number of people flew compared to 2012, and the load factor on the planes increased from last year. The load factor is the ratio of passengers to available seats on the planes. Airport and airline officials are shooting for the highest load factors possible.

The combined inbound and outbound average was around 70 percent. That's up from 2012, when the load factor was 68 percent.

Skoglund said last month's figures were bolstered by good weather. Only two inbound and outbound flights were canceled in a month often known for fog. When the weather is clear she said it also happens to be one of the busiest months for air travel with the holidays and local colleges letting out.

She said federal marketing dollars designated to help bolster air service in rural communities has helped spread the word about Walla Walla's daily round-trip flights to Seattle.

"If our impressions are correct that the marketing is doing its job we should continue to see growth in 2014," she said.