

# Aviation through Regional Aspirations- Growth Beckons?

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.1026EDU0551>

Received: 15 August 2026; Accepted: 25 August 2026; Published: 03 September 2026

## ABSTRACT

India is fast emerging as an aviation hub. Every year there are new airports being planned. The central government came out with UDAN scheme to promote common man flying cheaply in regional routes by capping the fare. Metro routes are always busy but the regional routes are not much. Hence this study looks at the challenges faced, constraints if any, governmental support, airlines interest and their future focus so that aviation can be seen from the regional perspective. The future is possible through ATRs and small aircrafts in smaller airports, narrow strips, military airports and will ensure more interest among people of the most populated country. The push by the government in ensuring last mile connectivity will boost more airlines to enter the market and the future looks very prospective.

**Key words:** Aviation, airlines, regional connectivity, Airports, India

In the USA, regional air services provide a vital bridge for many rural and remote communities that would otherwise be isolated from economic opportunities, major education and healthcare facilities, and social connections. While large cities benefit from extensive road, rail, and air transportation networks, smaller towns and regions with low population density face challenges in accessing state-of-the-art facilities due to their geographic remoteness. The importance of regional aviation cannot be overstated in a country as large as the United States. The National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) identifies over 3,200 public airports nationwide, with over 500 classified as regional airports, serving smaller communities. These regional airports provide a lifeline for areas where ground transportation options are limited, too imposing in terms of travel times, or impractical due to natural barriers such as mountains, deserts, or water. A few short runway lengths can open access to specialised urban medical care, rapid disaster relief, vital supplies, new tourism dollars, and educational opportunities – services that would be unattainable or significantly delayed through overland travel alone.... Across the nation, there are 570 airports servicing lesser-populated areas. The air connectivity provided to these communities generate \$134 billion in economic activity annually. These regional airports directly create employment opportunities for 1 million individuals, contributing \$36 billion in wages.

Statista figures shows that in 2020, there were 62 certificated regional carriers in U.S., down from 66 carriers in the previous year. In addition, regional aviation offers a sustainable solution for connecting these communities, often at a lower environmental cost than building extensive highway networks or rail lines over challenging terrain. Compared to the resource-intensive construction of a 500km highway, developing two airports with a total of 2-3km of runway is more economical, has a lower environmental impact, and demands less land utilisation, while stimulating economic development and providing access to basic services. However, regional air connectivity in the U.S. has been steadily eroding, with a concerning acceleration of this trend since the COVID-19 pandemic. The share of domestic flights between major hubs increased by nearly 6% between 2000 and 2019. A multitude of factors has contributed to this challenge, including a severe pilot shortage that has led to the grounding of over 500 regional aircraft and the withdrawal of air services from 324 communities. The ageing fleet of small regional jets, with the youngest aircraft being 15 years old and not all compatible with modern navigation systems, further exacerbates the problem. Beyond the numbers are millions of people living in small communities throughout North America who rely on the air service.

Regional air connectivity in the UK involves strengthening connections between regional airports and major hubs like London to boost economic growth and tourism. The government has implemented Public Service

Obligation (PSO) routes to subsidize routes that might not be commercially viable, particularly to connect Scottish Islands airports, Glasgow, Cardiff, Anglesey, and other regional destinations to London.

Considering that there is a need for connectivity for people living at remote locations, this regional connectivity is important. The regional connectivity is some thing like a hub and spoke model. For Jammu airport, it will act as a hub and the spokes are Udamapur, Rajouri etc. These airports will have connectivity through either ATR or through some Dakota airplanes. To ensure that this is operational, Central government introduced UDAN ( Ude Desh ka Aam Nagarik) to fix the fares and also the routes.

India's Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS), known as UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagarik), aims to improve regional air connectivity by making air travel more affordable and accessible, particularly in underserved areas. Launched in 2016, UDAN focuses on connecting unserved and underserved airports, including helipads and water aerodromes, to facilitate travel and boost economic development. Some of the key aspects of UDAN are, affordable air travel restricting the fares to about Rs.2500 for the maximum distance of 500 kms, more airports and airstrips being developed and the overall government support. UDAN has facilitated travel for over 1.49 crore passengers, enhancing air travel accessibility, especially in underserved regions. UDAN also provided for Yatri cafes and seaplane operators.

Under the UDAN Scheme, the business in small cities of India has also benefited. For example, under the UDAN Scheme air service has been started at Ahmedabad-Kishangarh, Indore-Kishangarh, Delhi-Kishangarh, and Hyderabad-Kishangarh routes. This has grown the marble industry of Kishangarh by 3 times. 1000 new routes along with additional 100 airports will be operationalized in the future under UDAN. 14 water aerodromes will be introduced for sea-plane operations along with 36 heliports. India has a total of 487 airports and airstrips. In the case of Andhra Pradesh, there are airports like Donakonda, Kadapa, Kurnool, Puttaparthi, Rajahmundry, Tirupati, Vishakhapatnam and Vijayawada. If we see airports like Donakonda, Kurnool, Kadapa, Puttaparthi needs to be given more ATRs in between which can improve more business across. Similarly, airports like Neyveli and Vellore airports in Tamil Nadu needs to be connected more to the major cities in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh via ATRs. There was an airline in Kerala which connected between Trivandrum, Kochi and Kozhikode which was later removed. The airline by name Awad Aerostat had 50% of the seats earmarked for government officials. Air Pegasus was a short-lived Indian regional airline headquartered in Bangalore and based at Kempe Gowda. The airline was a subsidiary of Decor Aviation, an aircraft ground-handling services company. It commenced operations on 12 April 2015 with its inaugural flight between Bangalore and Hubli. The airline suspended operations on 27 July 2016, facing financial difficulties. At that time, Air Pegasus was serving eight airports across South India with a hub at Kempe Gowda in Bangalore, using a fleet of three ATR 72-500 aircraft.

TruJet was a regional low-cost airline in India that operated between 2015 and 2022. It was based in Hyderabad, with a secondary hub in Chennai. The airline ceased operations in February 2022 due to financial difficulties stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. The airline focused on connecting tier-2 cities in India. Operated to 14 domestic destinations in the Middle and Southern regions of India. Similarly, there was another airline called Paramount Airways from Madurai with 76-seater Embraer aircrafts. However, due to financial reasons like Jet and Kingfisher, it stopped functioning. Air Mantra was a regional airline that operated in India from July 2012 to April 2013. The airline's operating base was Chandigarh Airport. Air Mantra primarily served northern India with daily flights connecting Amritsar and Chandigarh. It was the first regional airline to launch in India in five years. However, the airline suspended operations in April 2013 citing technical reasons, they had connected Jammu with Chandigarh and Amritsar and vice versa.

Air Carnival was an Indian regional airline based at Coimbatore International Airport with a hub at Chennai International Airport and serving Tuticorin, Tiruchirappalli and Coimbatore. Air Carnival was promoted by the Coimbatore Marine College (CMC) Group. The airline ceased operations on 6 April 2017. They had a single ATR for their operations.

Zexus Air Services, which was operating the now grounded carrier Zoom Air, on Friday said its flying permit has been renewed by aviation regulator DGCA. The airline was founded in 2013 and began operations in 2017, with a flight from Delhi to Durgapur, with a stop at Kolkata. Zoom Airlines India is a full-service carrier,

meaning several benefits, such as a complimentary baggage allowance, are included in the price of the ticket. They were stopped by DGCA for safety reasons but got their licences renewed during 2024, started operations from Delhi to Ayodhya but has stopped since.

Zav Airways planned scheduled regional services from its proposed hub at Kolkata Netaji Subhas Chandra Airport. Zav planned to operate services throughout the northeast and east of the country, connecting Kolkata with Aizawl, Bhubaneswar, Ranchi, and Patna. The carrier planned to initially operate with a fleet of Let 410 turboprop aircraft. Now the carrier has abandoned plans to launch operations. Similar is the case with Turbo Air.

Star Air currently operates a fleet of 5 Embraer E145 and 4 E175 aircraft from its three operational bases, Bengaluru Airport (BLR), Hyderabad (HYD) and Belagavi Airport (IXG) to 22 destinations across India that include Jodhpur, Nagpur, Hyderabad, Tirupati, Kishangarh (Ajmer), Jamnagar, Bhuj, Ahmedabad, Surat, Nanded, Bengaluru, Goa, Shivamogga, Gulbarga, Belagavi, Jaipur, Adampur (Jalandhar), Delhi (Hindon), Lucknow, Pune, Mumbai, Kolhapur. E175 aircrafts are the regional connect aircrafts with about 76 seats.

IndiGo currently operates 48 ATR 72 aircraft. In 2017, IndiGo inducted its first ATR 72-600 aircraft to enhance regional connectivity. They placed an order for 50 ATR 72-600 aircraft in 2017. IndiGo has progressively expanded its operations and now serves approximately 60 destinations with these aircraft. Recent additions to its network include Gondia, Lakshadweep, Jagdalpur, Jharsuguda, and Dharamshala. They want to be also the leader in the regional aircrafts sector which was earlier dominated by SpiceJet. India one Air operated ATRs connecting Bhubaneswar, Cooch Behar, Jamshedpur, Jeypore, Kolkata, Raipur, Utkela and Vizag. Cooch Behar, Utkela are now connected to major cities which help people in the vicinity to use these ATRs and also for tourism purposes. Understanding the need for more regional connectivity to boost tourism, Shank Air, Uttar Pradesh's first full-service airline, operating from the Noida Jewar International Airport. It plans to expand both domestically and internationally. Air Kerala is backed by a group of UAE-based Malayali entrepreneurs and is headquartered in Kochi. [Analysts](#) say that it aims to offer ultra-low-cost fares, targeting smaller cities in Kerala and potentially routes to the Middle East. The Al hind Group, a known travel agency, will launch Al hind Air, focusing on regional connectivity and later expanding to international routes. J&K has both major and smaller airstrips. The major airports are Jammu Airport and Srinagar Airport, with Srinagar being the only international airport in the region. In addition, there are eleven regional airports planned under the UDAN scheme. In the case of Jammu and Kashmir, Udhampur, Rajouri, Kishtwar, Poonch, Panzgam, Miran Sahib, Jhangar, Gurex, Fukche, Chusal, Chamb, Akhnoor could be tapped after normalcy sets in which will enable more tourists with chartered flights from domestic markets.

*"A common man who travels in slippers, should also be seen in the aircraft. This is my dream." - Prime Minister Narendra Modi. With the economy growing, this dream will be realised soon.*

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