

AIR CARGO AND SHIPPING

Illinois air cargo operations play a pivotal role in Illinois' economy by allowing the state's manufacturing and agriculture industries to transport and receive goods across the country and globe. Air cargo and shipping operations at Illinois airports enable the growth of many specialized industries, including those of e-commerce and biomedical materials highlighted here.

CHICAGO - ILLINOIS' CARGO HUB

Illinois is home to two of the top 20 air cargo handling hubs by weight in the United States. The City of Chicago is ranked 6th nationally, handling similar amounts of annual air cargo between its three largest airports: Los Angeles, Miami, Cincinnati, and New York City. Rockford, IL is also one of the top 20 air freight handling hubs in the United States. In 2019, Illinois airports statewide processed 2.16 million tons of freight and employed over 7,600 people in air cargo related jobs.¹ Chicago O'Hare International Airport (ORD) is the largest handler of air cargo statewide, processing approximately 1.76 million tons of air cargo which amounts to over 80 percent of the state's annual air cargo. Chicago Rockford International Airport (RFD) also processed a large portion of the state's air cargo, approximately 350,000 tons. Chicago Midway International Airport (MDW) rounds out the top three airports in Illinois with over 21,000 tons processed in 2019.

SUPPORTING THE GROWTH OF E-COMMERCE IN THE MIDWEST

Online retail sales have grown steadily over the past decade, and the upwards trend has been amplified in 2020 and 2021 by the COVID-19 pandemic. Illinois airports are well-positioned to support the growing online retail sales industry and play a significant role in the nationwide surge in online retail sales and e-commerce. An example of one Illinois airport that currently supports the rapidly growing e-commerce industry is RFD. Located approximately 90 miles northwest of Chicago, RFD has become major hub for e-commerce. Airport officials report a 300 percent increase in cargo volumes from 2015-2020.² Most recently, RFD experienced a 15 percent increase in air cargo volumes between 2019 and 2020, a change largely attributed to COVID-19 and the proliferation of e-commerce.

RFD has two of the state's largest cargo and shipping tenants, United Parcel Service (UPS) and Prime Air, and handles 35 to 40 flights from air cargo tenants every 24 hours. RFD is UPS's second largest hub in North America and has been since 1994. In 2018, UPS invested \$15 million to upgrade their facilities at RFD to add more space and modernize the sorting system. The upgrades increased UPS's sorting capacities at the airport to 131,000 packages an hour. In 2019, RFD spent \$12 million to expand its air cargo facilities by 128,000 square feet to accommodate Prime Air. Amazon flies 10 Prime Air cargo flights in and out of the airport seven days a week.³ In 2019 there were over 5,000 air cargo-related jobs at RFD.



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PRODUCE SHIPPING FROM MIDAMERICA ST. LOUIS AIRPORT

Smaller Illinois airports also support the state's growing freight and air cargo industry by hosting on-airport air cargo-related tenants. An example of this is located at MidAmerica St. Louis Airport (BLV) in Mascoutah, Illinois. BLV is home to North Bay Produce warehousing facility. North Bay Produce is a cooperative of over 30 grower-owners from across North, South, and Central America that produce a wide variety of fruits and vegetables. The North Bay Produce warehouse facilities have been located at the airport since 2012 and provide warehousing services and oversees quality and distribution of imported and domestic produce. The facilities also serves as North Bay Produce's United States center for overflow packing and cold storage. At any given time the facilities at BLV can hold over 1.3 million pounds of produce that arrives to the warehouse via air and truck cargo.



¹ Bureau of Transportation Statistics (T-100), accessed 2021

² WIFR Newsroom, "Chicago Rockford International Airport sets record cargo numbers," 2021

³ FlyRFD.com; Isaac Guerrero "UPS to invest \$15M in Rockford airfreight hub," 2018

SUMMARY

From supporting the growing e-commerce industry to facilitating the movement of fresh produce, Illinois' airports play a crucial role in the state and nation's freight and cargo sectors. Illinois' airports support these industries by providing space for storage and distribution of goods and commodities and by employing over 6,000 people across the state. demand for air cargo that began years ago but accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic.