



## **Mesa Airlines: Major Carrier Code-Share Operations**

Note: This column only covers Mesa's operations conducted as code-share alliances with major carriers. For Mesa's independent operations, see the columns on Mesa Airlines and Mesa Airlines- Farmington New Mexico in the Commuter airlines section.

Mesa Airlines began operations in 1980 at Farmington, New Mexico flying independently within the four corners states. Mesa landed its first major carrier code-share alliance on April 1, 1990 when the carrier became a United Express feeder on behalf of United Airlines at the Denver, Colorado hub. Initial service began with four daily flights from Farmington to Denver using 13-seat Beechcraft 1300 and 19-seat Beechcraft 1900C airliners. Service was later expanded with up to 13 daily flights however each flight then made a stop at a city in southwest Colorado before continuing to Denver. Farmington was the headquarters and maintenance base for Mesa requiring more flights to be directed through the airport. The Beech 1300's were soon retired and the 1900C's were soon replaced with taller "stand-up cabin" Beech 1900D's. Larger 30-seat Embraer 120 Brasilia's were added later in 1990 followed by 37-seat De Havilland Dash-8's in 1995. Mesa had been operating flights from Santa Fe, New Mexico to Denver independently and it wasn't until mid-1995 that these flights were converted to operate as United Express using only Beech 1900D's. All service to Denver ended in early 1998 when Mesa lost its affiliation with United Airlines citing operational failures and was replaced by Great Lakes Airlines as the United Express feeder at Denver. The following photos were all captured at Albuquerque in the 1990's. Mesa did not serve Albuquerque under the United Express banner during this time however the carrier occasionally rotated aircraft with the United paint scheme through Albuquerque for use on Mesa's independent routes within New Mexico.



Mesa Airlines Beechcraft 1300 in United Express livery.



Mesa Beech 1900C in United Express livery.



Mesa Beech 1900D in United Express livery.



Mesa Embraer 120 Brasilia's served Farmington in a new United Airlines livery adopted in 1993.



Mesa De Havilland Dash-8's served Farmington in the new United Express livery.

On November 1, 1992 a second code-share affiliation began serving America West Airlines at the carrier's Phoenix hub. Mesa's flights from Farmington and Gallup, New Mexico to Phoenix began operating as America West Express using Beech 1900D's and Embraer 120 Brasilia's. Flights from Farmington to Las Vegas, Nevada were operated in 1994 and 1995 with a Brasilia and a nonstop flight from Farmington to Phoenix was upgraded to a Dash-8 for a short time in 2000/2001. America West Express Service to Gallup was discontinued in late 1999 and new service from Santa Fe to Phoenix was operated for just over a year in 2000 and 2001. Flights from Farmington to Las Vegas (with a stop in Cedar City, Utah) were briefly reinstated in 2007 as well as a flight from Farmington to Salt Lake City with a stop in either Moab or Vernal, Utah. These operations occurred during the time that America West Airlines and US Airways were merging so both routes were initially flown as America West Express and later became US Airways Express. As Mesa was retiring its fleet of Beech-1900D's in the mid-2000's, it was anticipated that the last remaining Beech 1900D route from Farmington to Phoenix would be upgraded with Dash-8 aircraft. Instead, the route was discontinued on May 30, 2008 ending all presence of Mesa Airlines in Farmington, the city where Mesa was founded. This route had also been changed to operate as US Airways Express shortly before it ended.



Mesa Beech 1900D at Farmington in the original America West Express livery.

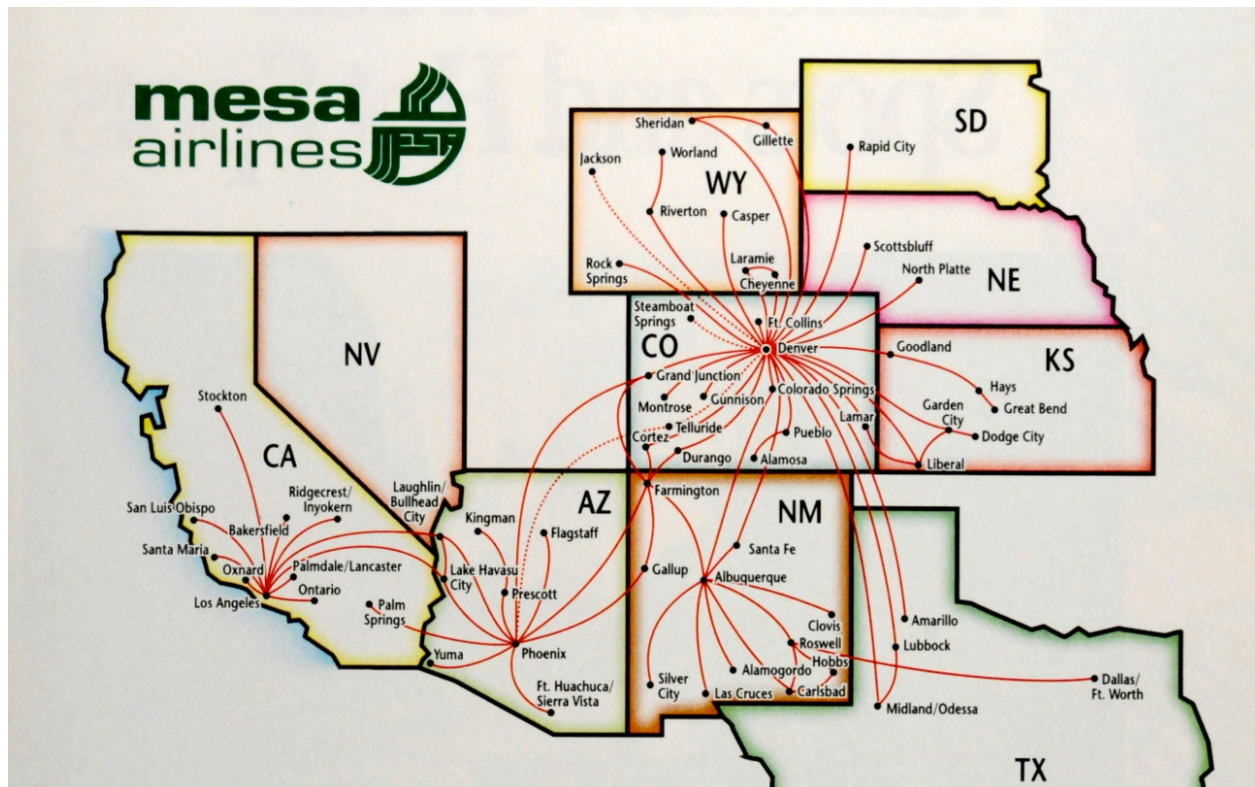


Mesa De Havilland Dash-8 in a new and final America West Express livery.



Mesa Beech 1900D in a US Airways Express livery.

During the 1990's, Mesa acquired several other carriers and created a holding company called "Mesa Air Group". In 1995 the Mesa Airlines subdivision was designated as "Mountain West Airlines" but returned to the "Mesa Airlines" name the following year. On January 3, 2001 all flights from Farmington and Santa Fe flown with Beech 1900D's had been switched over to operate under the certificate of Air Midwest, another wholly owned subsidiary of Mesa Air Group. More information on Air Midwest can be found below.



Mesa Airlines route map from 1994 showing United Express routes at Denver and Los Angeles, America West Express routes at Phoenix, and Mesa's independent routes at Albuquerque and Dallas/Fort Worth. Farmington, New Mexico was a central hub for all Mesa operations.

In 1995 Mesa Airlines obtained its first regional jets with a pair of 70-seat Fokker 70's for use on its America West Express operation at Phoenix but not used on any routes to New Mexico. Two years later the Fokker 70's were replaced with 50-seat Canadair CRJ-200's and service from Albuquerque to Phoenix began with these aircraft on July 15, 2002 as America West Express. Larger CRJ-700 and CRJ-900 regional jets were soon obtained for America West Express but were operated under a newly formed subdivision of Mesa Air Group called "Freedom Airlines". The first of these aircraft began serving Albuquerque from Phoenix on December 1, 2002. Freedom Airlines was later merged into the Mesa Airlines subdivision by the end of 2003. More information on Freedom can also be found below.



Mesa Canadair CRJ-200 in the America West Express livery.



Freedom Airlines CRJ-700 operating for Mesa in the America West Express livery.



Freedom Airlines CRJ-900 operating for Mesa in the America West Express livery.

The America West Express flights continued until late 2007 when America West Airlines merged with US Airways converting all Mesa flights at Phoenix to operate as US Airways Express. The CRJ-200's and -700's were later phased out until only 86-seat CRJ-900's were used for the US Airways Express flights. US Airways then merged into American Airlines from 2013 through 2015. During the merger process, Mesa operated flights from Albuquerque to Los Angeles as US Airways Express for two weeks during late summer 2014 supplementing American Eagle flights operated by SkyWest Airlines on the route. Mesa officially became an American Eagle affiliate on November 6, 2014 when the carrier began Eagle flights at American's hubs at Dallas/Fort Worth (DFW) and Los Angeles. Flights from Albuquerque to DFW began the same day replacing some of American's mainline MD-80's on the route however there was no further service to Los Angeles. Some of the Albuquerque-Phoenix flights were converted to American Eagle in August, 2015 with the remainder converting on October 17, 2015, the final date that all US Airways flights became American Airlines. Flights to Phoenix were later supplemented by SkyWest as well as American mainline jets. Mesa operated service as American Eagle on the Roswell-Dallas/Fort Worth route with a CRJ-900 in late 2017 supplementing other Eagle carriers. Service to Santa Fe operated from spring 2019 through spring 2020 with flights to Phoenix and Dallas/Fort Worth utilizing CRJ-900's. Service from Albuquerque to Dallas/Fort Worth returned during 2020 and 2021 also using CRJ-900's. After an absence of several months, Mesa's CRJ-900's returned as American Eagle at Albuquerque briefly in late 2022 and early 2023. One flight between Santa Fe and Phoenix returned for the month of January, 2023, and on one flight between Roswell and Dallas/Fort Worth in February, 2023. American Airlines then ended its relationship with Mesa as American Eagle on April 3, 2023 citing operational concerns with Mesa.



Mesa CRJ-900 operating as US Airways Express.





Mesa CRJ-900 operating for American Eagle at the Santa Fe Regional Airport.

Mesa also operated several other code-share contracts with major airlines in the 2000's. For most of the year 2003 Mesa operated a Frontier Jet Express operation on behalf of Frontier Airlines at the carrier's Denver hub. CRJ-200 aircraft were used and Frontier Jet Express flights from Albuquerque to Denver were flown. The Frontier Jet Express service was then replaced by Horizon Airlines in early 2004.



Mesa CRJ-200 in the Frontier Jet Express livery.

Service with United Airlines as United Express was reinstated in 2003 using regional jets and Mesa began CRJ-200 flights from Albuquerque to Denver on February 20, 2004. This service at Albuquerque was short lived and ended later the same year being replaced by SkyWest Airlines. Flights as United Express returned to Albuquerque in 2015 when Mesa acquired new 76-seat Embraer 175 regional jets and began service from Albuquerque to United’s hub at Houston. This service is not consistent as United also has other United Express affiliates flying the Albuquerque-Houston route and uses their own mainline aircraft on some flights as well. Schedules generally change once per month. Mesa’s service as United Express has not returned to any other city in New Mexico since 1998.



Mesa CRJ-200 in a United Express livery worn during the 2000’s.



Mesa CRJ-700 in the United Express livery after United had merged with Continental Airlines in 2012.



Mesa Embraer 175 in the current United Express livery that began in 2019.



Mesa CRJ-900 in the Mesa Airlines house livery at the Santa Fe airport.



## Freedom Airlines

Freedom Airlines was a separate division of Mesa Air Group that was created in 2002 to operate larger CRJ-700 and CRJ-900 regional jets as America West Express. This operation was necessary due to a restriction Mesa had with another code-share affiliation with US Airways restricting the use of aircraft with more than 50 seats. Freedom operated America West Express service from Albuquerque to Phoenix beginning on December 1, 2002 but their aircraft were merged into the Mesa Airlines division by the end of 2003 when the restrictions with US Airways were lifted. Freedom Airlines continued to operate service as Delta Connection on behalf of Delta Air Lines in the northeastern United States until Freedom was shut down in 2010.

## Air Midwest

Air Midwest was a commuter airline established in 1967, purchased by Mesa Airlines in 1991, and operated as a separate entity under Mesa Air Group. On January 3, 2001, the Phoenix to Farmington and Santa Fe routes operated with Beech-1900D aircraft as America West Express on behalf of America West Airlines were switched from Mesa Airlines to Air Midwest. The Santa Fe service was discontinued by the fall of 2001. New flights from Farmington to Las Vegas with a stop in Cedar City, Utah and from Farmington to Salt Lake City with a stop in Vernal, Utah were briefly operated in 2007 as well as an extension to Moab, Utah from a Phoenix to Farmington flight. These flights all started as America West Express but were switched to US Airways Express in 2007 during the merger process of America West Airlines and US Airways. The last operating route from Farmington to Phoenix was discontinued on May 30, 2008 when Mesa Air Group had retired the Beech 1900D aircraft fleet and shut down all operations by Air Midwest.

For a complete overview of Air Midwest's service within New Mexico, see the Air Midwest link under the "Commuter airlines" section.