



Frontier Airlines 1950-1986

Frontier Airlines was created on June 1, 1950 as a merger of three carriers; Monarch Air Lines of Denver, Arizona Airways of Phoenix, and Challenger Airlines of Salt Lake City. Frontier was based in Denver at the former offices of Monarch Air Lines and initial routes through New Mexico included an Albuquerque to Salt Lake City route with stops at Gallup and Farmington, New Mexico, Durango, Cortez and Grand Junction, Colorado, and Price and Provo, Utah. This route was considered as mail route number 73 by the Civil Aeronautics Board. A second route was flown between Denver and Phoenix with stops at Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Alamosa, Monte Vista, and Durango, Colorado, Farmington and Gallup, New Mexico, and Winslow, Flagstaff, and Prescott, Arizona. A southern route began about one month later from Phoenix to El Paso with stops at Safford, and Clifton, Arizona, as well as Lordsburg, Deming, and Las Cruces, New Mexico. Another route from Phoenix to Tucson, Nogales, Bisbee, and Douglas, Arizona was also started and was authorized to be extended to Lordsburg but the Lordsburg leg did not begin. Silver City, New Mexico was added to the southern route in late 1951. Tucson was later added to this route and the stops at Lordsburg, Deming, and Las Cruces all ended in April, 1953. Traffic from Lordsburg and Deming was then directed to use the Silver City airport. By the mid 1950's the southern route from Phoenix was redirected at Silver City to continue onto Albuquerque rather than El Paso. The Albuquerque to Salt Lake City route as well as the Denver to Gallup portion of the Denver-Phoenix route were formerly flown by Monarch Air Lines and the routes into Arizona were obtained from the operating certificate of Arizona Airways (Arizona Airways had stopped all operations prior to the merger into Frontier). Challenger Airlines flew from Denver and Salt Lake City into Wyoming and onto Billings, Montana and did not serve any point in New Mexico. All flights operated with 24-seat Douglas DC-3 aircraft. In 1954 an extension of the Salt Lake City-Albuquerque route onto El Paso was applied for but not approved. This route would have made stops at either Alamogordo, New Mexico or at Socorro, Truth or Consequences, and Las Cruces, New Mexico. During the 1950's the stop at Colorado Springs was dropped off the Denver route and the stops at Provo and Price, Utah were dropped off the Salt Lake City route with new stops added at Vernal and Moab, Utah. Farmington was the crossroads point on the Salt Lake City-Albuquerque and Denver-Phoenix routes so the city was made into a mini-

hub. Twice each day flights came in from all four directions converging on Farmington at the same time. Farmington had the largest operation for Frontier through the 1950's with more flights and routes than Denver which was only a terminus point for three routes. Denver did not grow into a hub larger than Farmington until 1959 (Denver continued to grow and became the carriers' primary hub). 1959 also saw the introduction of the 44-seat Convair 340 aircraft and new non-stop flights began from Farmington to Phoenix and Salt Lake City. Some flights from Farmington to Denver began making only one stop at Durango. In the early 1960's, the stop at Monte Vista, CO was dropped off the Denver route and the stops at Prescott, Safford, and Clifton, AZ were dropped off routes into Phoenix. Nonstop service from Albuquerque to Salt Lake City and Tucson was first proposed in 1961 and the Tucson nonstops began in 1965 but nonstop flights to Salt Lake City never started. On July 10, 1963, Frontier began a new route from El Paso to Denver formerly flown by Continental Airlines. This route made stops at Alamogordo, Albuquerque, and Santa Fe, New Mexico as well as Alamosa, Pueblo, and Colorado Springs, Colorado. Nonstop flights from Denver to Albuquerque were also added at this time with the Convair 340's. The Salt Lake City-Albuquerque multi-stop route saw an extension to Alamogordo and El Paso in 1963 as well, a route that was initially applied for in 1954. By 1966 the DC-3's were retired from all New Mexico operations and the piston engine Convair 340's were upgraded with turboprop engines, re-designating them as Convair 580's. The 580's became the workhorse for Frontier's flying into small communities throughout the Rocky Mountains. The mini-hub operation at Farmington was discontinued by 1970 however Frontier continued to have a strong presence at the city maintaining flights in all four directions with a total of at least ten flights per day. In 1967 Frontier merged with Central Airlines which significantly increased Frontier's route network into Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas but did not immediately affect any of the operations in New Mexico.



Frontier Airlines Douglas DC-3 at the old Albuquerque Municipal Airport terminal in the 1950's.



Frontier Convair 340 at the Albuquerque Municipal Airport terminal in the early 1960's.

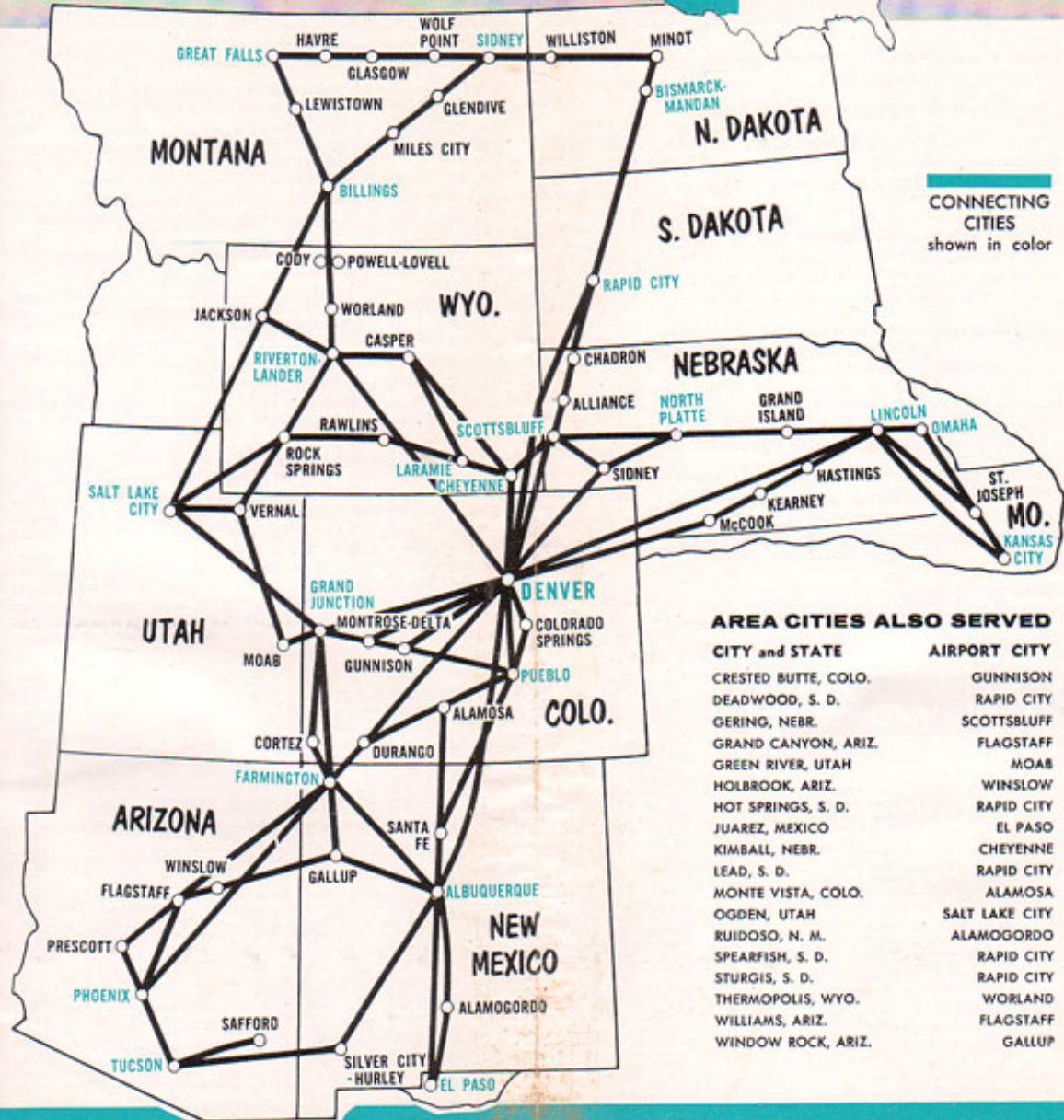


Frontier Convair 580 at the new Albuquerque Sunport terminal that opened in 1965.

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Frontier route map from 1964 with Albuquerque and Farmington highlighted as connecting cities.

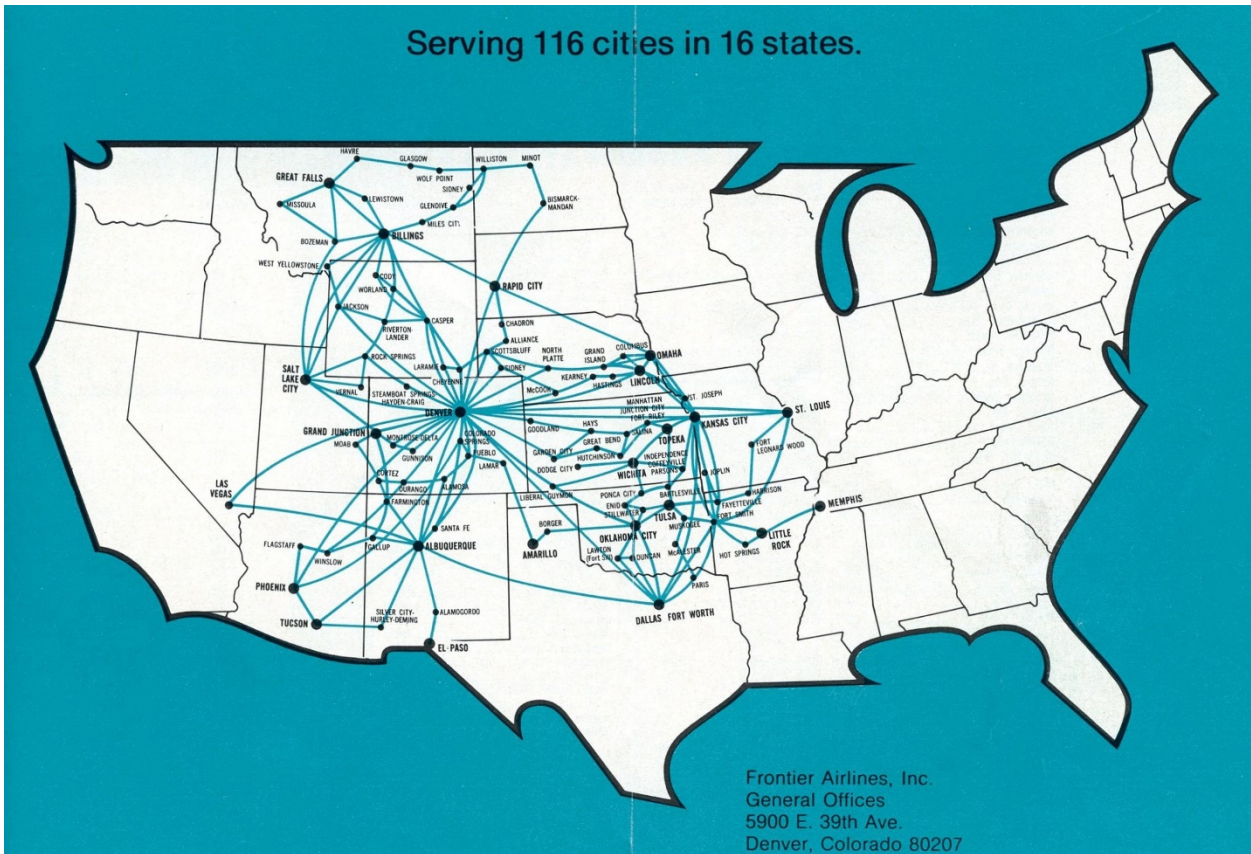
Frontier introduced its first jet service to Albuquerque in 1967 with the Boeing 727 “[Arrow Jet](#)” on nonstop flights to Denver and El Paso as well as to Tucson that continued onto Phoenix. New routes from Albuquerque to Dallas and Las Vegas were awarded to Frontier which began in late 1969. Larger Boeing 727-200’s soon came online however the 727’s were replaced with Boeing 737’s in 1969 which became the mainstay jet for the carrier. Service to Santa Fe was suspended in mid-1972 due to runway conditions at the airport and although Frontier planned to return to the city for several years, service was never reinstated. The new routes to Dallas and Las Vegas were also suspended for the year of 1972 but returned in 1973. Flights from Silver City to Tucson and Phoenix ended in 1974 as well as the stop in Winslow, Arizona on the Denver to Phoenix route. The jet flights from Albuquerque to Dallas ended in 1976 followed by the Las Vegas flights in 1979 and nonstop jets from Albuquerque to Phoenix operated from 1978 through 1982. The extension from Alamogordo to El Paso ended in 1978 and all service from Albuquerque to both Alamogordo and Silver City ended the following year being replaced by smaller commuter airlines. Direct flights from Farmington to Salt Lake City were dropped in 1978 as well as from Farmington to Phoenix a year later. Nonstop flights from Farmington to Denver began in mid-1979 and Convair 580 flights continued on an Albuquerque-Gallup-Farmington-Durango-Alamosa-Denver route until late 1981. At that time all service to Gallup had ended as well as the service between Farmington and Albuquerque. Smaller commuter airlines, particularly Sun West and Mesa Airlines, established service on these former Frontier routes. Service to Cortez and Alamosa had also ended and the last of the Convair 580’s operating from Farmington to Durango and Denver were replaced by Boeing 737 jets on June 1, 1982 giving Farmington its first jet service. Some flights operated nonstop from Denver to Farmington but due to the short runways at the Farmington airport, the 737’s had to stop in Durango for more fuel before continuing back to Denver.



Frontier Boeing 727-100 “[Arrow Jet](#)” introducing service to Albuquerque in 1967.



Frontier Boeing 737-200 introduced in 1969 to replace the 727's.



Frontier route map from 1969 showing the new routes from Albuquerque to Dallas and Las Vegas.

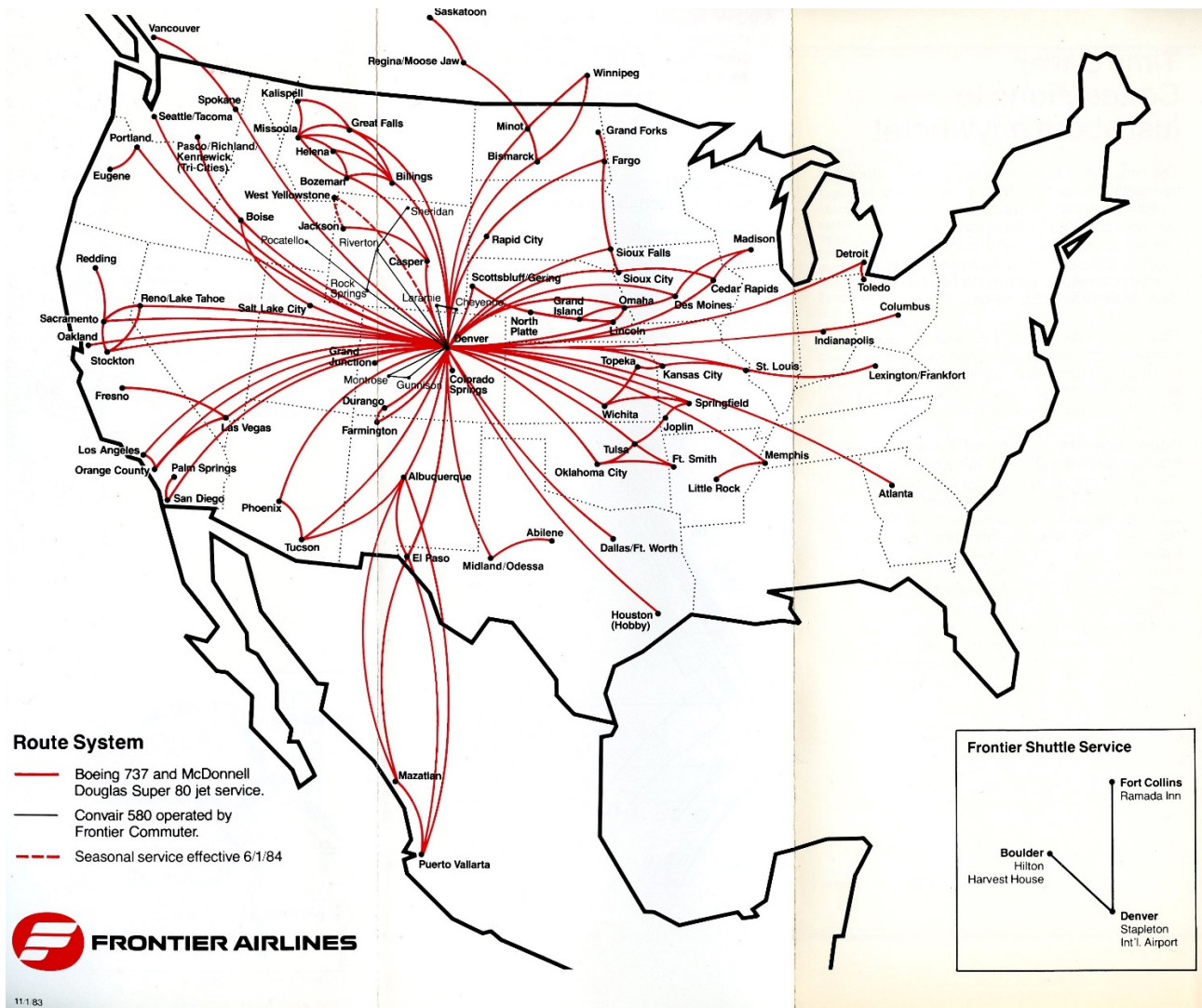
By the late 1970's, Frontier was concentrating on putting all their resources into the building of their hub at Denver, discontinuing most routes that did not directly feed into the city. With an all-jet fleet, Frontier expanded from Denver throughout the United States and Canada and began a major expansion into Mexico by initiating nonstop flights from Albuquerque to Mazatlan, Puerto Vallarta, Guadalajara, Manzanillo, and Ixtapa/Zihuatanejo, all of which originated in Denver. Frontier's jet service to many smaller cities, including Farmington and Durango, proved to be too much capacity and too expensive to operate so Frontier created a new feeder service called "Frontier Commuter", which was operated by Combs Airways and used the former Frontier Convair 580's. This service replaced the 737's at Farmington on October 1, 1984 but only lasted about three and a half months when Combs Airways shut down ending all Frontier representation at Farmington.



Frontier Boeing 737-200 wearing a new livery and logo adopted in 1978.



Frontier Commuter Convair 580, formerly operated by Frontier Airlines.



Frontier route map from 1983 showing the remaining service to New Mexico at Albuquerque and Farmington.

Frontier began operating larger MD-80 jets in 1982, complementing the 737's, and two years later service from Albuquerque to Midland/Odessa, TX was initiated as a continuation of flights from Denver. This was in addition to the Albuquerque to El Paso and Tucson flights, also extensions from Denver. The carrier was facing serious financial burdens by this time and was acquired by People's Express Airlines in 1985 however Frontier remained operating independently. On August 24, 1986, Frontier succumbed to bankruptcy and completely shut down ending 36 years of operations which included service to New Mexico the entire time.



Frontier McDonnell Douglas MD-80 introduced in 1982.

After Frontier had shut down, Continental Airlines (which also had a large hub at Denver) then acquired People's Express (which had owned Frontier) and revived many of the Frontier routes that Continental was not already serving. The carrier also acquired many of the former Frontier 737 jets. For a brief time in 1986 and 1987 a Continental Express feeder carrier operated service from Farmington to Denver and Albuquerque and from Albuquerque to Tucson using Convair 580's on some flights. These were all routes flown by Frontier for many years. Continental then discontinued its entire hub operation at Denver in 1994 which included all of the former Frontier routes. Earlier in 1994 however, a second Frontier Airlines evolved and once again revived many of the jet routes of the first Frontier including 737's on a Denver-Albuquerque-El Paso route. This carrier is described further under the link for "Frontier Airlines 1994-today". In 2017 the new Frontier Airlines adopted a new paint scheme for its aircraft that uses the traditional "arrow" used by the original Frontier until 1978, and the stylized "F" that was used thereafter.



The new Frontier Airlines of today displaying the arrow and the stylized F of the old Frontier on an Airbus A320neo at the Albuquerque International Sunport.