



1934 - 1937



1937 - 1960

CONTINENTAL



1960 - 1967



**CONTINENTAL
AIRLINES**

1967 - 1991

Continental
Airlines 

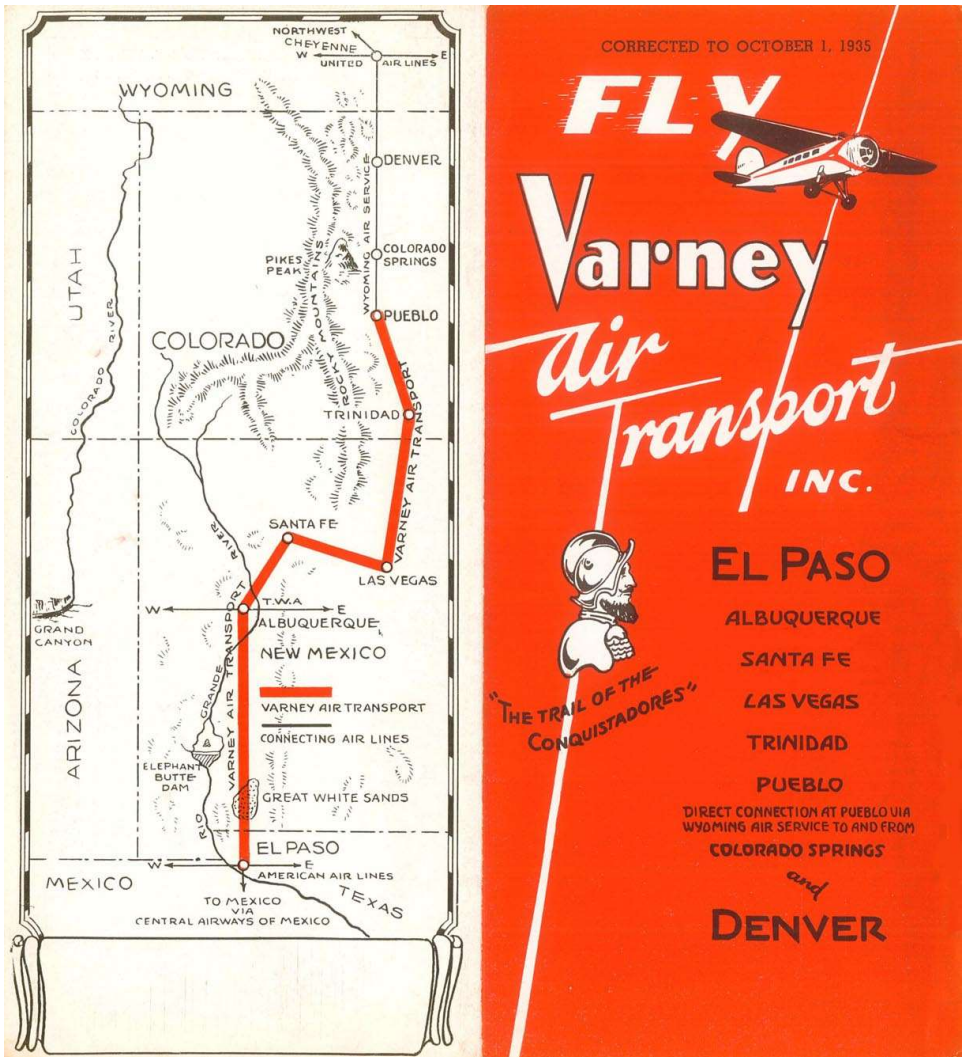
1991 - 2012

Continental Airlines Continental Express

Continental Airlines, which was last based in Houston, Texas, began as Varney Speed Lines on July 15, 1934 with a single route from El Paso, Texas to Pueblo, Colorado stopping at Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Las Vegas, New Mexico. At Pueblo, an interchange flight with Wyoming Air Service provided flights onto Colorado Springs and Denver, Colorado, Cheyenne, Casper, and Sheridan, Wyoming, and terminated at Billings, Montana. This north-south route connected passengers with the east-west routes of American Airlines at El Paso, with TWA at Albuquerque, and with United Airlines at Cheyenne (later changed to Denver). Varney Speed Lines, Southwest Division, was created by Walter T. Varney who also created Varney Air Lines based in Pasco, Washington which evolved into United Airlines earlier in 1934. The carrier first operated Lockheed 5C Vega aircraft and Wyoming Air Service operated Stinson SM-8A's followed by Boeing 247D's. Varney Speed Lines was modified to Varney Air Transport in late 1934 and Trinidad, Colorado was added to the El Paso-Pueblo route. In 1937 Varney began obtaining Lockheed Electra aircraft and purchased the Pueblo-Colorado Springs-Denver route segments from Wyoming Air Service which extended the north-south route from El Paso all the way to Denver. This route was labeled as U.S. Mail Route 29.



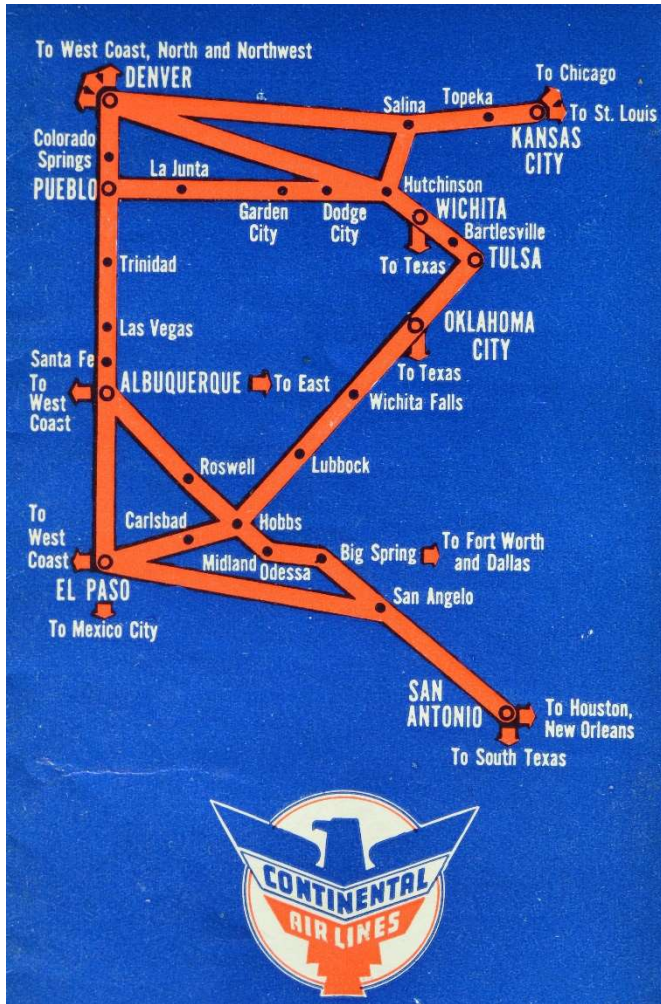
Varney Speed Lines Lockheed 5C Vega aircraft on display at the old Albuquerque Municipal Airport.



Varney Air Transport route map from 1935.

In 1935, Robert F. Six joined the airline and soon became President and CEO, changing the carriers' name to Continental Air Lines on July 1, 1937. Six would go on to oversee the carrier for the next 44 years until 1981. A ticket office in downtown Albuquerque was first opened in the Hotel Franciscan then moved to the Hilton Hotel by 1939. The stops at Las Vegas and Trinidad along the north-south route were suspended for several years with Las Vegas being reinstated in mid-1940 and Trinidad not until about 1949. A new eastbound route was added in 1939 branching off from Pueblo to Wichita, Kansas and by 1941 was extended onto Tulsa, Oklahoma. Lockheed Super Electra aircraft were introduced in

1939 accommodating 14 passengers followed closely by the Lockheed Lodestar which seated 18 passengers. At that time there were four flights per day operating through Albuquerque and Santa Fe and each flight carried both a flight number and a name of an Indian tribe; Flight 1 was Apache, flight 2; Sioux, flight 3; Aztec, and flight 4; Navajo. On May 11, 1940 a new route was added from Albuquerque to the southeast New Mexico cities of Roswell, Hobbs, and Carlsbad, and then onto El Paso. On May 1, 1944 a new route branched off from Albuquerque, Roswell, and Hobbs to Midland/Odessa, Big Spring, San Angelo, and San Antonio, Texas. In mid-1945 a new route from El Paso, Carlsbad, and Hobbs to Lubbock and Wichita Falls, Texas, then onto Lawton, Oklahoma City, and Tulsa, Oklahoma was started which was later extended to Kansas City. Both of these routes crisscrossed at Hobbs and flights were timed so that both aircraft would be on the ground simultaneously enabling passengers to transfer between them. This essentially made Hobbs into a hub city for Continental.



Continental Airlines route map from 1946.



Continental Lockheed L-12 Electra at the Albuquerque Municipal Airport.

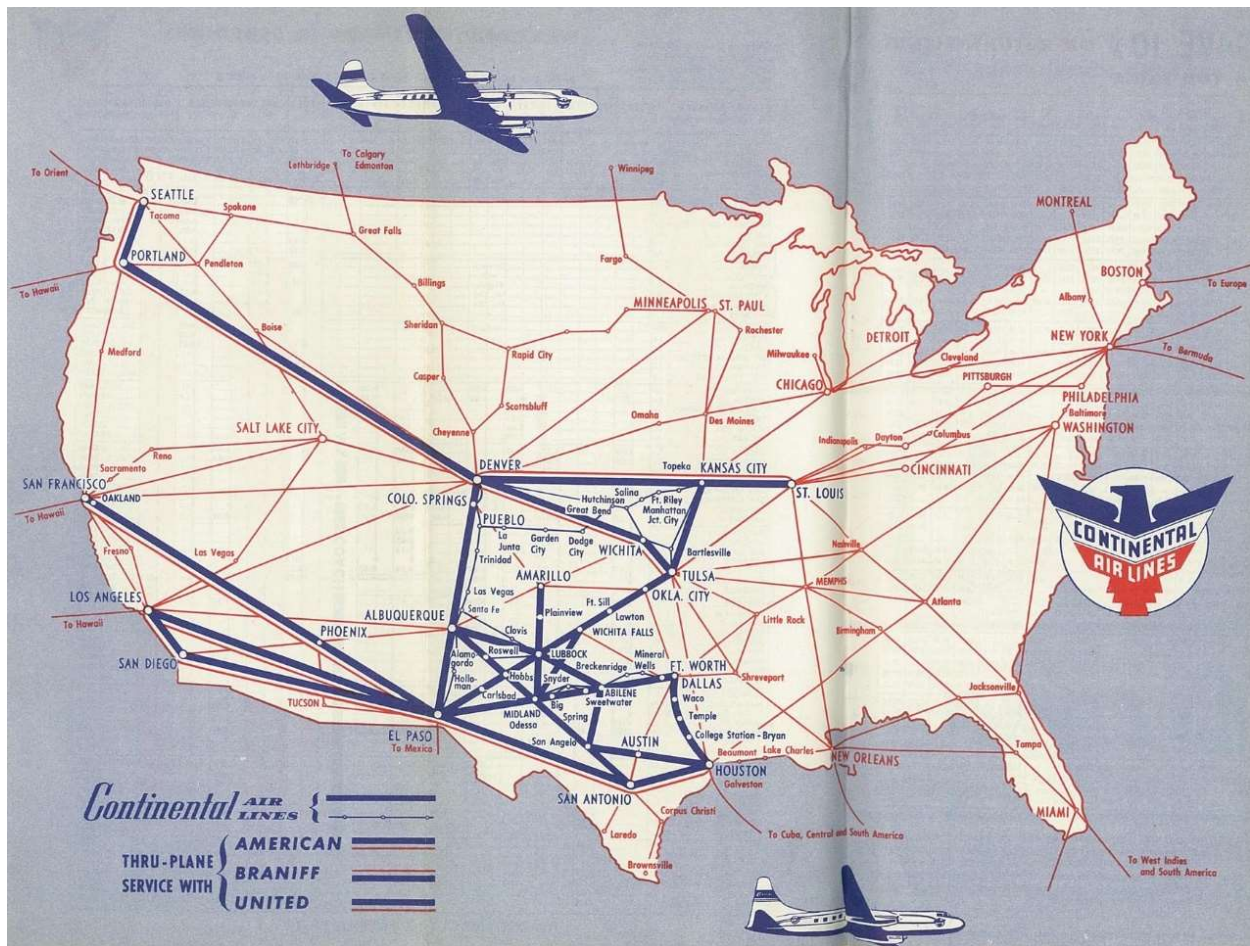


Continental Lockheed L-14 Super Electra at Albuquerque.



Continental Lockheed L-18 Lodestar with the Albuquerque terminal in the background.

Continental consistently upgraded their aircraft fleet adding 21-seat Douglas DC-3's in 1944 followed by 40-seat Convair 240's in late 1948. Convair 340's, which seated 44 passengers, replaced the 240's in 1953 and new nonstop flights between Albuquerque and Denver had started. A Convair 340 was also used on a single flight from Kansas City to El Paso that stopped in Hobbs and Carlsbad from 1954 through 1957. In 1950, stops were added at Raton, New Mexico along the Denver-Albuquerque portion of the north-south route and at Socorro, Truth or Consequences, and Las Cruces, New Mexico along the Albuquerque-El Paso portion. These stops were flown with DC-3's but all ended in 1954 due to insufficient passenger demand. New service to Alamogordo, New Mexico was then added as a stop between Albuquerque and El Paso. The original stop at Las Vegas, New Mexico ended in 1952 due to runway conditions at the airport and although Las Vegas was still listed on Continental's route map for another four years, service was never reinstated. All routes through New Mexico were now considered as Route number 29 by the Civil Aeronautics Board. On April 1, 1955, Continental merged with a local service carrier, Pioneer Air Lines, giving Continental long awaited access from Albuquerque to Dallas and Houston by way of Santa Fe, Clovis, Lubbock, Abilene, and Ft. Worth, Texas. Eastbound flights from Roswell, Carlsbad, and Hobbs were also added into Dallas and Houston with multiple stops.



Continental route map from 1955 showing the new routes throughout Texas obtained with the Pioneer Air Lines merger.

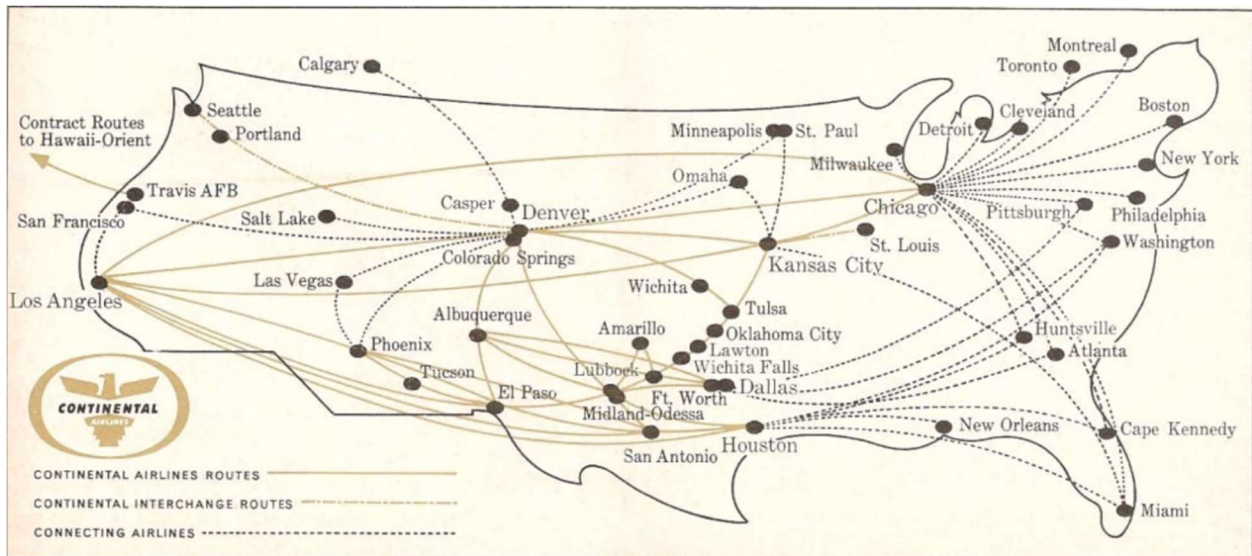


Continental Douglas DC-3 at Albuquerque wearing a new livery entitled "Blue Skyway". Continental's DC-3's served New Mexico cities from 1944 until 1963.



Continental Convair 340 at Albuquerque. The 340's served New Mexico through most of the 1950's.

During the 1950's Continental began a series of interchange routes with American, Braniff, and United Airlines to cities along the west coast as well as to St. Louis, Missouri. Much larger Douglas DC-6 aircraft were obtained to serve them however these interchange routes went through Denver and El Paso, none were routed through Albuquerque. In the late 1950's and early 1960's, Continental had applied for new routes from Albuquerque to Phoenix, Las Vegas, Nevada, and San Francisco however these routes were never approved by the Civil Aeronautics Board. By 1959, new, four-engine, 52-seat Vickers 812 Viscount II aircraft were added which provided nonstop flights from Albuquerque to Dallas. Viscounts replaced the Convair 340's and were used on some flights at Santa Fe, Clovis, Roswell, and Alamogordo. For a short time in 1961, Continental operated a much larger Douglas DC-7 aircraft on a Denver-Albuquerque-El Paso-San Antonio route and in 1962 the carrier introduced their first jet service to Albuquerque with the Boeing 720B. The jets operated on a Denver-Albuquerque-Midland/Odessa-Dallas route but were also short lived and discontinued only three months later. In 1963 all service to Clovis, Roswell, Carlsbad, and Hobbs was transferred to Trans-Texas Airways (later changed to Texas International). The Alamogordo service was transferred to Frontier Airlines and Santa Fe was split between both Frontier and Trans-Texas. Continental was then able to retire all of its ageing DC-3's from New Mexico services and Albuquerque was the only city left that Continental remained serving in the state. By this time the carrier operated all Viscount aircraft at Albuquerque.



Continental route map from 1965 after the service to many smaller cities was discontinued and new jet service was added to much larger cities.

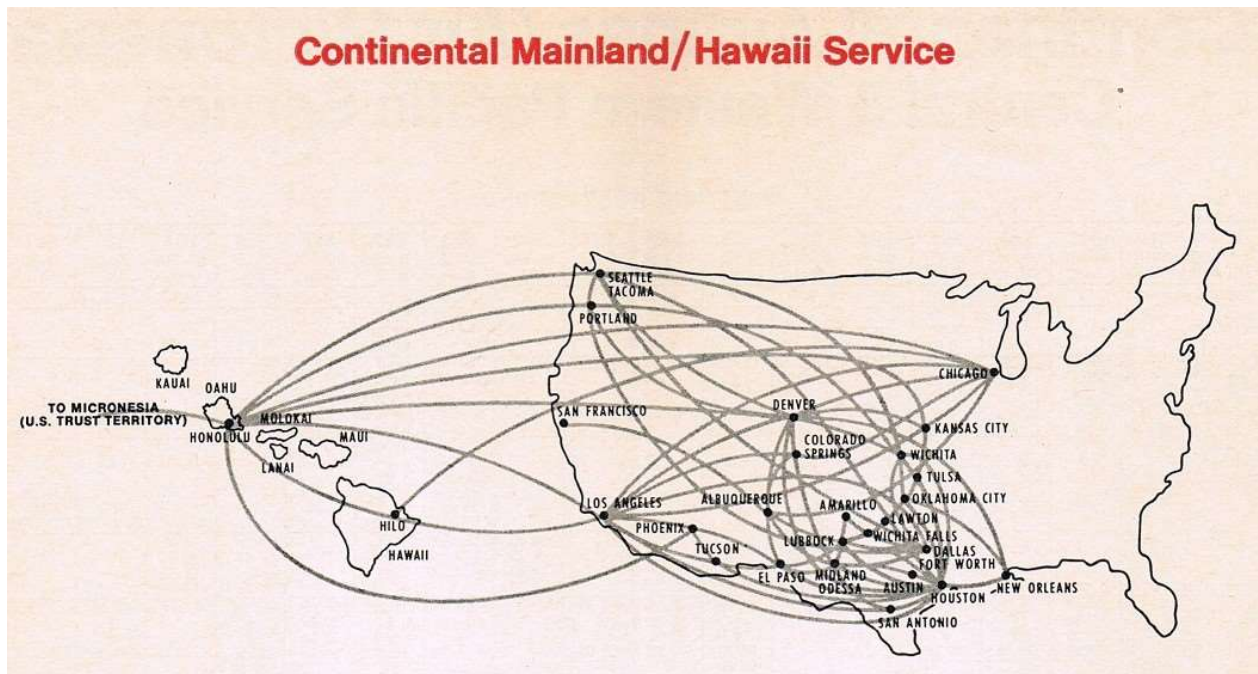


Continental Vickers Viscount II wearing a new golden livery and parked at a gate at the new Albuquerque Sunport terminal in 1965. Viscounts served ABQ from 1959 through 1967.



Continental's Boeing 720B called the "Golden Jet" briefly served Albuquerque in 1962.

In 1966 Continental reintroduced jet service back to Albuquerque with the Douglas DC-9 and within one year all Viscount flights were replaced with DC-9's jets. In 1967 Continental introduced the Boeing 727 on an Albuquerque-Dallas flight and a new route to Chicago was added in late 1969. Also added in late 1969 was a San Francisco-Albuquerque-San Antonio-Houston route which was Continental's first service to San Francisco. From 1951 through 1961 Continental operated an interchange service with American Airlines in which American operated from San Francisco to El Paso and Continental from El Paso to San Antonio and Houston. It would be eight years later before Continental was allowed to service San Francisco on its own with a route to San Antonio and Houston, this time through Albuquerque rather than El Paso. In the spring of 1973, the four-engine Boeing 720B made a brief return to Albuquerque on a single Denver-Albuquerque-El Paso round trip and by 1974 Continental had replaced all the DC-9's at Albuquerque with 727's, mostly the longer 727-200.



Continental route map from October 26, 1969 when new routes began from Albuquerque to Chicago, San Antonio, and San Francisco.

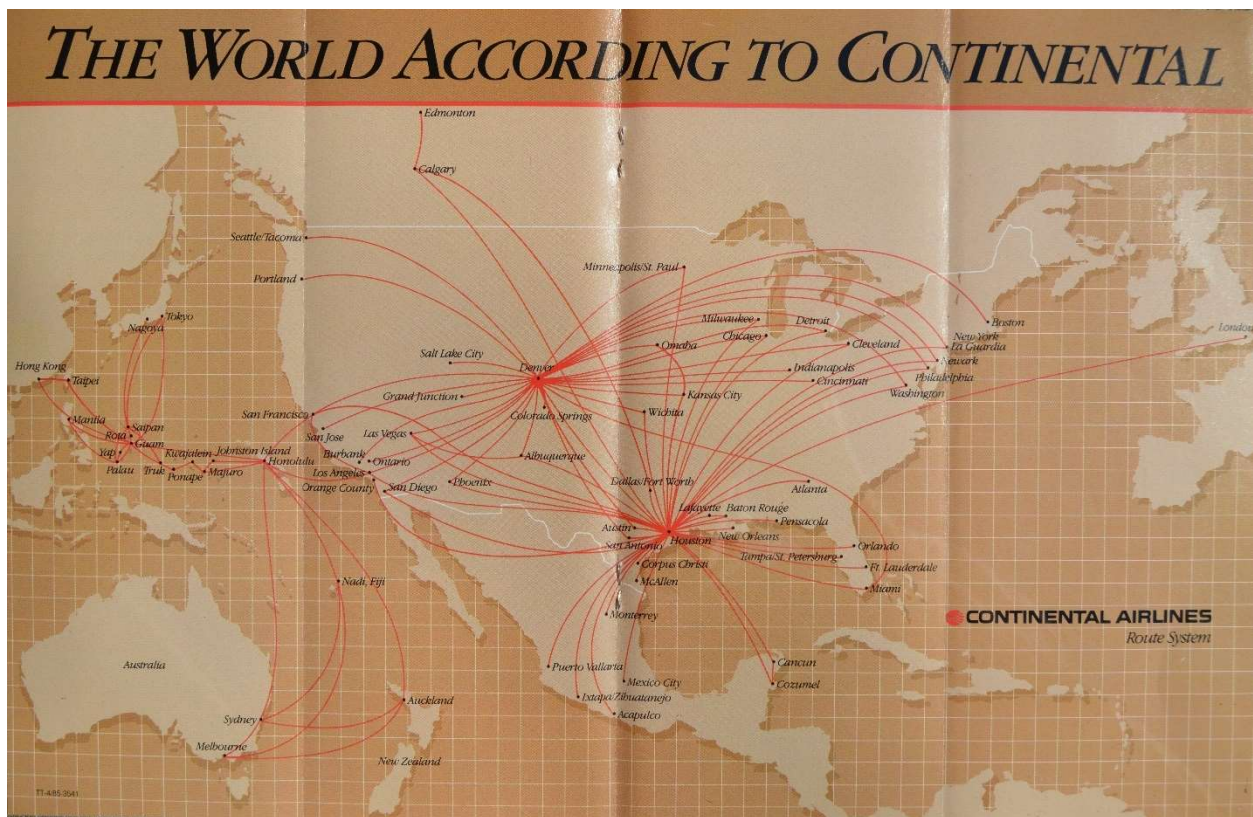


Continental Douglas DC-9 departing Albuquerque wearing a new livery adopted in 1967. The DC-9's initially served ABQ from 1966 through 1974.



Continental's Boeing 727-200 parked at the gate at the Albuquerque Sunport. The 727's served ABQ from 1967 until 1994.

Service at Albuquerque peaked during the summer of 1977 with 24 departing flights per day but after airline deregulation occurred in 1978, Continental began slowly downsizing. Service was dropped on the routes to Colorado Springs, Chicago, Dallas, Lubbock, Midland/Odessa, San Antonio, and San Francisco and the airline concentrated on building upon their service at Denver and Houston which were chosen to be their main hubs. The flights to El Paso were also maintained and from 1979 through 1982 some El Paso flights continued on to several resort cities in Mexico. A new flight from Albuquerque to Tucson was briefly operated in 1982 which was an extension off of a flight from Denver. Continental merged with Texas International Airlines in late 1982 which brought DC-9 jets back into the fleet and the carrier briefly operated flights to Los Angeles but dropped the route a few months later. Continental succumbed to bankruptcy and completely shut down in late 1983 but made a slow recovery and reinstated flights back from Albuquerque to Denver by summer 1984 followed soon by flights to Houston. New service to Las Vegas, Nevada was added as an extension for an incoming flight from Houston from 1985 through 1991 and service to El Paso was reinstated off and on from 1989 through 1994.



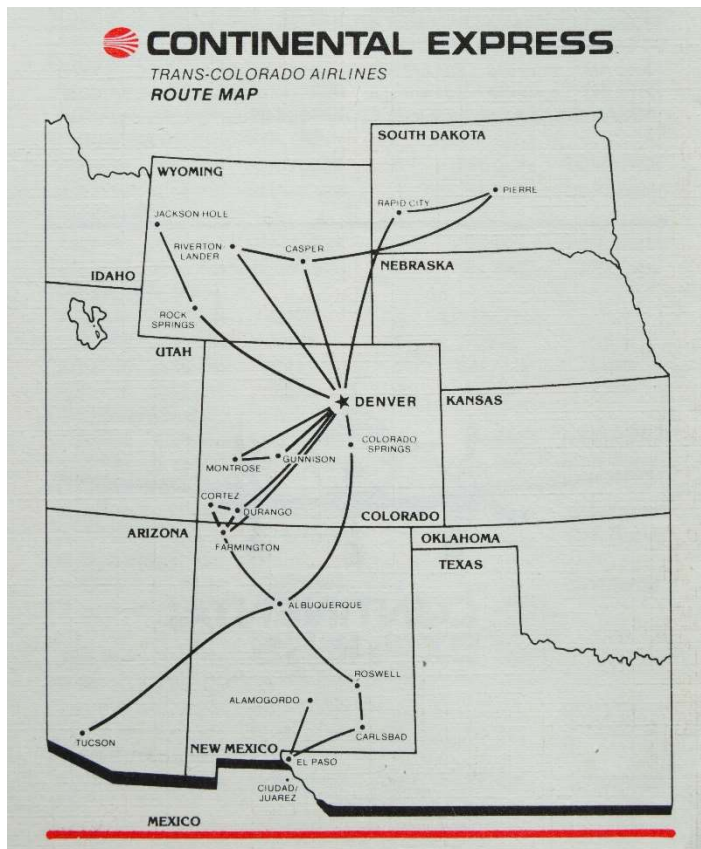
Continental route map from 1985 showing most routes centered at the Denver and Houston hub cities.

A commuter carrier named Pioneer Airlines with no affiliation to the original Pioneer Air Lines of the 1950's, began serving the Santa Fe to Denver market in 1981. Two years later Pioneer took on the

designation as “Continental Commuter” becoming the first commuter airline to start a code-share operation on behalf of a major airline in New Mexico. The carrier used 19-seat Swearingen Metro aircraft and the Santa Fe operation was flown until mid-1985. This service marked the start of a gradual comeback for Continental Airlines service to rural communities in New Mexico.

In mid-1986, commuter carrier Trans-Colorado Airlines began a code-sharing alliance with Continental and became a Continental Express feeder carrier providing service from Farmington, New Mexico to Denver. On January 1, 1987 the carrier came to Albuquerque with Continental Express flights to Colorado Springs and Durango and three months later added service from Albuquerque to Farmington, Roswell, Carlsbad, and Tucson as well as from El Paso to Alamogordo, Carlsbad, and Roswell. Trans-Colorado used 19-seat Swearingen Metroliners and a 50-seat Convair 580 was leased from Sierra Pacific Airlines for the Tucson flights as well as two of the Albuquerque-Farmington flights. The El Paso-Alamogordo and El Paso-Carlsbad-Roswell-Albuquerque routes nearly mirrored some of the routes that Continental Airlines itself flew from 1940 through 1963. As Trans-Colorado incurred serious financial debt operating as Continental Express, all service in New Mexico ended by August 1, 1987.

In 1990 and 1991 a second Continental Express carrier, Rocky Mountain Airways, served the Farmington-Denver market with Beech 1900C, ATR-42, and DeHavilland Dash-7 aircraft. Both Continental Express carriers, Trans-Colorado and Rocky Mountain, painted their aircraft with the same livery as Continental Airlines. This would be the last Continental Express service to rural New Mexico for the next 20 years.



Continental Express route map from April 1987 showing a small hub operation at Albuquerque.



Continental Express Swearingen Metroliner's served several cities in New Mexico in 1986 and 1987.



Continental Express ATR-42's served Farmington, New Mexico in 1990 and 1991.

From the late 1980's, Continental operated several versions of the Boeing 737 as well as the McDonnell Douglas MD-80 at Albuquerque which over time replaced the 727's and DC-9's. Occasionally when severe weather impacted Denver, many Continental flights would divert and converge into Albuquerque all at once with a variety of different aircraft including wide-body DC-10's. In late 1993 Continental tried a new lower cost marketing strategy called "Continental Lite" in which most flights from Albuquerque were converted to. This operation was not successful however and all flights reverted back to classic Continental Airlines within two years. The hub operation at Denver was discontinued in 1995, just prior to the opening of the new Denver International Airport, and flights from El Paso to Albuquerque and Denver ceased on October 30, 1994 putting an end to the original route that started Continental Airlines 60 years prior. By this time Continental was down to operating only one route from Albuquerque to Houston however, as the airline was building a large hub at Newark, New Jersey, nonstop flights between Albuquerque and Newark began in the year 2000. At first the Newark flights only operated on the weekends but became daily in 2007 and 2008. Continental Express flights operated by ExpressJet Airlines with 50 seat Embraer 145 regional jets were introduced on some Houston flights in 2003 as well as a nonstop to Cleveland, Ohio on the weekends during the summer months. For the Christmas 2008 holidays, the Albuquerque schedule was operated entirely by Continental Express with a total of nine daily flights to Houston. During the annual Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta in early Fall of each year, Continental would increase their service with more flights and larger jets such as Boeing 737-900's and 757's. This was done from the years 2002 through 2011. Continental Express operated by ExpressJet also inaugurated Embraer 145 regional jet service to Hobbs, New Mexico with nonstop flights to Houston on July 1, 2011. This route was once flown by Continental with multiple stops in the latter 1950's. Each of the Continental Commuter and Continental Express feeder carriers are further evaluated under separate columns for each carrier.



Continental operated the McDonnell Douglas MD-80 on select flights at Albuquerque from 1986 through 2004. The logo on the tail had been changed from black to red.



Continental Boeing 737-300 at Albuquerque wearing a new livery adopted in 1991. Continental also operated Boeing 737-500's, -700's, -800's and -900's at ABQ through 2012.



A Continental "Lite" Boeing 737-500 at Albuquerque which was Continental's attempt at a lower cost operation from 1993 through 1995.



Continental Express Embraer-145 regional jet at Albuquerque. Continental Express flew the -145's at Albuquerque from 2003 and at Hobbs from 2011.

Continental merged with United Airlines on April 1, 2012 ending nearly 78 years of service to Albuquerque, surpassing TWA with the longest duration of service by any one airline. The new airline kept the United name but decided to keep the Continental paint scheme and repainted all aircraft with Continental's colors. A Boeing 737-900 aircraft that Continental had painted in their classic 1950's "Blue Skyway" paint scheme was also maintained. This aircraft comes through Albuquerque periodically. United Express began new service from Santa Fe to Denver with regional jets in 2013 which was also a part of the original Continental route between El Paso and Denver. For a more detailed look at the carriers that operated as Continental Commuter or Continental Express, see the links for each carrier in the "Major airline regional partners" section.

On July 15, 1994, the 60th anniversary for Continental Airlines, the carrier flew a vintage Douglas DC-3 aircraft through Albuquerque. The DC-3 is painted in the same 1950's paint scheme as the Boeing 737-900 mentioned above.



A United Airlines Boeing 737-900 wearing the 1950's livery of Continental Airlines arrives at Albuquerque on September 29, 2015.



A restored Continental Douglas DC-3 visits Albuquerque on July 15, 1994, the company's 60th anniversary.