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PRESS ADVISORY

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REAP Awards Funding under Kansas Affordable Airfares Program

At its regular monthly meeting of July 13, the Regional Economic Area Partnership (REAP) took action to assure and enhance affordable airfares in Kansas.

REAP recommended the award of a \$4,875,000 state grant to Sedgwick County to address all statutory criteria for the allocation of funding including the priorities of maintaining affordable airfares to eastern and western U.S. destinations for residents throughout Kansas. The action also renews a contract with AirTran for the 12 months beginning July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2010. The grant requires a local match of 25 percent or \$1,625,000, which will be pledged by Sedgwick County and the City of Wichita.

"REAP has taken the responsibility for administering the Kansas Affordable Airfares Program as a serious matter, dedicating staff time and resources into maintaining the transparency and integrity of the program," stated REAP chairman, Mayor John Waltner of Hesston. "Our action today specifically addresses statutory objectives to ensure that air travel is more available, more competitive, and more affordable to all Kansans."

This grant will continue and enhance a program that saved Kansans \$46.2 million dollars in 2008. According to studies conducted by Mid-Continent airport, Kansans from three of every four Kansas counties regularly utilizes the airport and this program will continue to lessen the need for Kansans to leave the State when traveling by air. This program helps residents from many communities throughout Kansas, including some of the biggest users of the Mid-Continent airport: Colby, Hays, Salina, Junction City, Emporia, McPherson, Hutchinson, Great Bend, Garden City, Dodge City, Newton, El Dorado, Independence, Parsons, Winfield, and Wichita.

In addition, a fiscal impact study conducted by the Center for Economic Development and Business Research at WSU concluded that AirTran's presence has a pronounced impact on the local economy and on state and local tax receipts. The study shows AirTran's presence in the Wichita MSA has increased employment by 9,720 jobs and the average annual payroll by \$283.4 million. As a result Kansas state government has received \$5.25 of benefits for each \$1.00 of funding that has been provided to the Affordable Airfares Program.

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"Commercial air service in South Central Kansas is an economic development tool that benefits all Kansans," stated Waltner. "People in our state save millions of dollars per year which goes back into our economy and our citizens' pockets to spend elsewhere, while also funding the state general fund. It's been a great investment for the State's companies and citizens."

REAP is a council of local governments comprised of thirty-six cities and counties in South Central Kansas. These local governments have voluntarily joined together to guide state and national actions that affect economic development in the region and to adopt joint actions among member governments that enhance the regional economy.

Under the authority of House Substitute for Senate Bill 475 and the omnibus appropriation bill, Senate Bill 2968, both enacted in the 2006 session of the Kansas Legislature, REAP was assigned authority for administering the Kansas Affordable Airfares Program. In the 2007, 2008 and 2009 legislative sessions, Governor Sebelius recommended and the Kansas Legislature appropriated \$5 million for continued funding of KAAP each year.

To learn more about REAP, go to www.reap-ks.org or contact Joe Yager at 316-978-6542 (joe.yager@wichita.edu).

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