

## New Airlines, Fast Trains Link Ukraine and EU



Air and train travel rebound this summer, prompting more choices and better prices.



The UBJ

By Lee Reaney

**KYIV** – With Ukraine’s air and rail traffic jumping by double digits this summer, new air routes and fast trains are integrating Ukraine with Europe.

Jumps in passengers reflect consumer confidence returning to Ukraine as Ukrainians open their wallets to spend on vacations this summer.

During the first half this year, passenger flow was up 68 percent, year over year, at Kyiv’s Zhuliany, the capital’s main airport for discount airlines. In June, the start of the summer travel season, traffic was up 74 percent.

Boryspil, Ukraine’s largest airport, handled 4.74 million passengers in the first half of this year – up 30 percent over the first half of last year.

Two weeks ago, Boryspil’s new management failed to seal a deal with Ryanair, causing the Dublin-based airline, Europe’s largest discount carrier, to abandon plans to fly to Ukraine this fall.

As Ukraine authorities struggled to win back Ryanair, Wizz Air, a rival discounter, announced radical fare cuts, a near doubling of seat capacity, new flights next year to Lisbon and Tallinn, and the possibility to expand beyond Kyiv and Lviv to Ukraine’s regional airports.



Passengers disembark from Wizz Air’s first flight from Berlin’s Schönefeld airport to Lviv’s Danylo Halytskyi International Airport, on June 18. (UNIAN/Yevheni Kravs)

Wizz Air to Regional Airports?

“We intend to work not only in Kyiv and Lviv, but also in other regional airports,” Owain Jones, Wizz Air’s Chief Corporate Officer CO said July 12 at a press conference here.

The Budapest-based airline will nearly double its seat capacity by adding another Airbus to its Kyiv base and spending an additional \$300 million on its 21 Ukraine routes.

Wizz Air dominates the low-cost market in Ukraine, carrying 50 percent of the nation’s discount passengers. Turkey’s Pegasus Airlines comes in second with 29.5 percent of the market, followed by FlyDubai at 11 percent, and Air Arabia at 4.5 percent.

“We have been working here for about 10 years,” said Wizz Air’s Jones. “We served more than 400,000 passengers on flights from Ukraine last year, which is 84% more than in 2015.”

While Ukrainian officials try to save the Ryanair deal, other discounters are nibbling at Ukraine's growing market.

In June, Ukraine's Yanair launched three-days-a-week flights from Zhuliany to Tel Aviv. In September,

Azeri-based Buta Airways begins flights from Kyiv to Baku. Next year, Germany's discount carrier Eurowings will launch flights from Kyiv to Berlin and Dusseldorf.

Infrastructure Minister Volodymyr Omelyan says he hopes to bring two more low-cost carriers to Ukraine by the end of this year.

In Lviv, Tetiana Romanovska, Lviv Airport CEO, says that four new airlines are to launch flights to the city this year

Responding to the arrival of low-cost airlines, Ukrainian International Airlines slashed prices on competitive European routes.

### 'Protectionist' Boryspil

When Ryanair announced its withdrawal, it accused Boryspil airport of protectionism.

"Regrettably, Kyiv [Boryspil] airport has chosen to protect high fare airlines (including UIA) and deprive Ukrainian consumers/visitors access to Europe's lowest airfares and widest route network," Ryanair said in a press release.

Boryspil Director Pavlo Riabkin dismissed the allegations saying: "Categorical conclusions are inappropriate in the case involving Ryanair."

Omelyan has charged collusion between UIA, responsible for half of the passengers at Boryspil, and Riabkin, a former board member of UIA's predecessor company, Aerosvit. Omelyan has called for Riabkin's firing. Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman has talked about opening Gostomel Airport to discount carriers. Currently used for cargo and by Antonov for test flights, Gostomel is 35 km northwest of Kyiv's center.

In other directions, Qatar Airways will launch daily flights from Boryspil to Doha in August in an effort to stem losses due to Qatar's loss of transportation ties with Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

With only UIA offering direct flights to North America, Omelyan announced after a visit to the US that a large US airline could launch direct flights to Ukraine next year. From 2006 to 2009 Delta Airlines offered flights between New York and Kyiv.



The first 'visa free' train prepares to depart Kyiv for Przemysl, Poland, via Lviv on June 11. That Sunday marked the start of a new visa regime with most of the EU. Ukrainians holding biometric passports do not need visas for two 90-day stays every year. (UNIAN/Vladimir Gontar)

### Fast Rail to Poland

With Wojciech Balczun, a Polish national at the helm of Ukrainian Railways, the state railroad is looking west.

After a test fast train from Kyiv-Lviv-Przemysl, Poland proved popular, Ukraine is starting two new fast routes this summer: Kovel-Chelm, Poland and Lviv-Krakow. Passport checks are conducted on board, sparing travelers long waits at the road crossings. With trains running nearly full, transportation officials predict that each route will carry 100,000 passengers a year. In the first four months of this year, trains to the EU carried 48,400 passengers --six times more than last year.

Local officials are discussing a plan to extend a EU standard gauge track – 1435 millimeter – the 60 km from Rava-Ruska on the Polish border to Lviv, This would allow fast trains between Lviv and Warsaw. The former Soviet Union largely has a slightly narrower gauge -- 1520 millimeters – to slow rail-based invasions from the West.

"It is necessary to invest about 50 million EUR in this project," said the Lviv Railway director Ivan Hruny. He added the EU-standard track would go as far as Briukhovychi, a suburban station 10 km northwest of Lviv city. Balczun has announced that \$96 million will be invested into Lviv Railways in 2017 to improve lines and upgrade rolling stock.

Looking south, Ukrainian Railways launched a new route in June from Lviv to Bulgaria's Black Sea resort of Varna. Deprived of Crimea, 343,000 Ukrainians visited Varna last year. The rail route will run 1,000 km: from Lviv to Ivano-Frankivsk, to Chernivtsi, across Eastern Romania to Varna.

Also aiming at the summer tourism market, Ukrainian Railways is launching services from Chernivtsi to Suceava, Romania, a 100 km route. Suceava is the center of a region dotted with castles, fortresses and historic churches.

By the Christmas holiday season, the railroad is to launch a fast train on a Kyiv-Lviv-Vienna route.

### Reservations Needed on Popular Intercity Trains

To travel inside Ukraine by high-speed Intercity train, it is increasingly essential to buy tickets in advance.

During the first half of this year, the trains operated at an occupancy rate of 92%. With nearly 2.5 million passengers thus far, that represents a 44 percent increase from the first half of 2016.

Offering real competition to domestic flights, the Kyiv-Kharkiv fast train carried 633,000 passengers this year – about 10 times the number of people who flew. Second in popularity was Kyiv-Dnipro, with 581,000 passengers, and Kyiv-Lviv, with 437,000.

With these new trains popular, Ukrainian Railways is offering this summer three seasonal Intercity routes: Lviv-Odesa, Dnipro-Odesa and Kyiv-Zaporizhiya.

For comments or news tips, please contact UBJ Reporter Lee Reaney at [lee.reaney@theubj.com](mailto:lee.reaney@theubj.com) (mailto:lee.reaney@theubj.com).

SLIDER PHOTO: Water cannons from airport fire engines greet the first Wizz Air flight from Berlin's Schönefeld airport to Lviv's Danylo Halytskyi International Airport, on June 18 (UNIAN/Yevheni Kravs)

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