

Direct Houston-Beijing flights confirmed, businesses prepare to board

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Reporter- *Houston Business Journal*

After years of discussions, Houston officially secured its first direct flight to China.

[Rumors began circulating about the flight](#) Jan. 9, but the [Houston Airport System](#) did not confirm the new [Air China](#) flight to Beijing until Tuesday at a press conference with Zhihang Chi, the airline's vice president and general manager for North America.

The flight, which is pending government approval, is expected to begin July 11.

Air China will fly the route on a Boeing 777, and it will offer the flight from George Bush Intercontinental Airport's Terminal D four times per week.

Flights out of Beijing will leave at 3 p.m. and arrive in Houston the same day at 3:30 p.m., while flights out of Houston will leave at 1:40 a.m. and arrive in Beijing at 5 a.m. the next day.

"This new direct route to China will ensure our success in growing the Texas regional economy and strengthen the global ties to our trade partners in China," Houston Mayor [Annise Parker](#) said in a statement.

[Charles Foster](#), co-chairman of Houston-based immigration law firm FosterQuan LLP, chairman of the Asia Society of Texas Center and chairman of the mayor's international trade and development council for Asia, told the *Houston Business Journal* China has become an increasingly important trading partner for Houston and the U.S.

"The biggest and most important aspect for the U.S. now and for the foreseeable future is and will be U.S.-Sino relations," Foster said. "It is critical Houston have as many links with China as possible."

Furthermore, Foster pointed out China's opportunities as a developing market are significant.

"If you look at the world economy, we are a mature economy, and most future growth will be in Asia — and a big part of that will be in China," he said. "The demands of China are enormous. If you look at energy, every energy projection shows they will have a huge shortage, and they will need to develop their energy relations around the world."

New trade opportunities abound with the flight, Foster added, especially for Chinese businesses looking to invest in Houston.

To assist Chinese-Houston business relations, Foster said he is in the beginning stages of forming an “umbrella organization” of businesses looking to improve ties between the two countries.

“A number of us are working with existing institutions to enhance relationships we already have,” he said. “This organization will strengthen the ties between Houston and China.”

As for Air China’s choice to fly from Houston to Beijing, instead of another large Chinese city, such as Shanghai, Foster said Beijing provides ample connections around the country. He pointed out that Beijing has high-speed rail connections to many major Chinese cities, so it will be easy for travelers to reach destinations around the country.

Air China also has existing direct flights to New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Vancouver.

Molly Ryan covers manufacturing, technology, the Port and logistics

<http://www.bizjournals.com/houston/blog/nuts-and-bolts/2013/01/direct-houston-beijing-flights.html>