

Driven by Demand

Female CEOs in travel rethink strategies to meet the needs of the market. BY CASANDRA KARPIAK

After years of disruption and adjustment, business travel this year reflects a more disciplined and strategic environment. Companies are traveling again with clearer intent and a sharper sense of what each trip needs to deliver.

Private aviation provides a useful lens into how senior executives and high-net-worth travelers evaluate travel value. Tia Minzoni, CEO, Stella Jet Experiences, leads a women-owned aviation company that has seen charter requests rise 40 percent since relocating operations to Texas. Notably, she said, nearly all of that growth has been referral-driven rather than paid advertising.

According to Minzoni, the strongest signal heading into 2026 is not simply increased demand, but how travelers choose to fly. "High-net-worth travelers choose companies like Stella Jets to buy back their time and peace," she said. "Flying private takes away the stress of the commercial airports, TSA lines, checking

luggage, noisy passengers, and delayed or canceled flights. When flying private, the schedule is on your own timeline."

Minzoni also pointed to growing openness around shared private charter models. "I was surprised by how many people are open to sharing a 'private charter,'" she said, noting demand for semi-private access has accelerated faster than expected.

That same willingness to rethink how people move

between cities now influences how airports plan routes and capacity. Christina Cassotis, CEO, Pittsburgh International Airport, said the distinction between hub airports and origin-and-destination airports has become more pronounced. "At hubs, the hub carrier really drives the strategy," she said. "For O&D airports, it's about matching the needs of the market to airlines that make sense."

The strategy moves away from dependence on a single airline and toward building a broader mix of routes and carriers serving different segments of the local travel market. "We've focused on all of those things over the past several years in Pittsburgh," said Cassotis, "and with the opening of our new terminal last year, we'll continue to pursue that strategy."

Behind these aviation trends is a broader reassessment of how organizations approach business travel. Christal Bemont, CEO, Direct Travel, said demand continues to rise, but expectations have shifted. "As companies plan for 2026, demand for business travel is growing, and CEOs are focused on how to cost-effectively scale travel without sacrificing experience, visibility or care for their people."



Charting a Course: Christina Cassotis, CEO, Pittsburgh International Airport (above), Tia Minzoni, CEO, Stella Jet Experiences (middle) and Christal Bemont, CEO, Direct Travel (bottom)

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