



Yesterday's report about [negotiations taking place between Birmingham, AL and the German state of Bremen by Joseph Bryant in AL.com](#) had some scratching their heads. Instead, it probably should have had folks wondering why it had taken so long to get to this point.

[An agreement signed in November 2011](#) between Alabama's development office and Germany's tenth largest city could be key in understanding how and why these talks are taking place — plus a reminder that it's not uncommon for these types of negotiations to take place at all.

Alabama's secretary of commerce, Greg Canfield, shared the following information with AL.com via a prepared statement back when the pact was announced:

"We have 68 German companies who have invested more than \$5.8 billion in Alabama. Since 2000, these companies have been responsible for 10,305 announced jobs in our state."

[This document produced by the U.S. Consulate General's office in Hamburg](#) (it's only eight pages) in 2011 spells out most of the reasons why the agreement still makes sense. The most recognizable of those companies has a significant presence in Central Alabama — it's Mercedes-Benz. The company's plant in Bremen is producing [the same C-series W205 sedans currently under production in Vance, AL](#). It was the main focus of [a follow-up visit made by the Bremen Economic Development agency in 2012](#).

[The recently completed \\$201.6 million renovation and expansion of Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport](#) gives the facility an opportunity to provide a less-crowded alternative to Hartsfield-Jackson International in Atlanta. It does not serve as a hub (Delta's main hub is located in Atlanta while Southwest effectively treats Nashville as its gateway to the southeastern United States). That said, [as the Birmingham Business Journal recently suggested](#), incentives will play a key role in whatever ends up happening with regards to international or domestic direct flight service. It also doesn't hurt that the current expansion project provides for additional gates to be added when and if the need is identified — and that [a recently released master plan for Hartsfield](#) still [needs to be priced out and receive public input](#).

While it may seem weird to hear about the mayor being involved in negotiations to secure direct flights, it is not unprecedented. The example most relatable may be what happened in Columbia, MO. Shortly after the announcement that the Tigers would be joining the SEC, then first-term Mayor Bob McDavid was able to secure direct flight service via Delta to and from Atlanta, GA. This service was discontinued shortly after it was announced — but [only because Delta thought American Airlines received a better incentive package to provide direct flight service to Chicago, IL \(via](#)

[O'Hare\) and Dallas, TX](#). A more recent example (resulting in direct flight service to the same two cities) is [what Bismarck, ND was able to secure from American via incentives](#).

Whether or not Birmingham is successful, the precedent is there. Time will tell what options will be available to area residents.

**Photo:** *Straßenbahn Bremen*. [kaffeeinstein](#)/Flickr.