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Apr 15, 2020

Alaska Air Group, Inc. (ALK)

$31.05 (As of 04/14/20)

Price Target (6-12 Months): **$33.00**

Long Term: 6-12 Months | **Zacks Recommendation:** Neutral
(Since: 05/15/19)
Prior Recommendation: Underperform

Short Term: 1-3 Months | **Zacks Rank:** (1-5) **3-Hold**
Zacks Style Scores: VGM:C
Value: C | Growth: B | Momentum: F

Summary

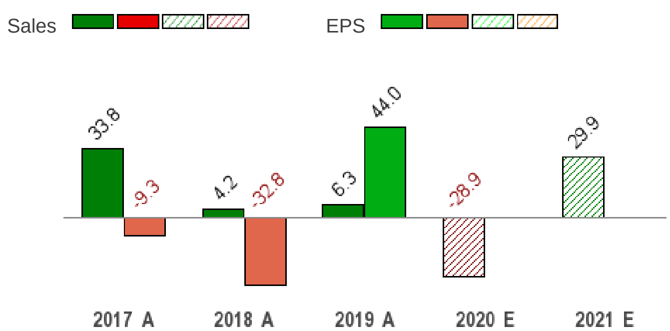
Shares of Alaska Air have plunged roughly 55% since the beginning of February due to the drop in air-travel demand for leisure travel in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. Due to the coronavirus-induced waning demand, Alaska Airlines plans to reduce capacity by 80% for April and May. In fact, Alaska Airlines expects demand to be significantly suppressed for the next several months. Despite this downturn, low fuel prices are expected to partly offset the adversity and aid the bottom line in turn. The carrier is also taking substantial cost-cutting measures, such as freezing hiring and reducing duty hours of management employees. To bolster its balance sheet, the carrier drew down $400 million on its line of credit and closed a secured loan for $425 million. Due to the ongoing economic crunch, it suspended dividend payments and buyback activities.

Price, Consensus & Surprise

Data Overview

52 Week High-Low	**$72.22 - $20.02**
20 Day Average Volume (sh)	**3,596,452**
Market Cap	**$3.8 B**
YTD Price Change	**-54.2%**
Beta	**1.54**
Dividend / Div Yld	**$0.00 / 0.0%**
Industry	**Transportation - Airline**
Zacks Industry Rank	**Bottom 15% (215 out of 253)**
Last EPS Surprise	**3.6%**
Last Sales Surprise	**0.3%**
EPS F1 Est- 4 week change	**-122.8%**
Expected Report Date	**04/23/2020**
Earnings ESP	**-14.9%**
P/E TTM	**4.8**
P/E F1	**NA**
PEG F1	**NA**
P/S TTM	**0.4**

Sales and EPS Growth Rates (Y/Y %)



Sales Estimates (millions of $)

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	1,804 E	2,084 E	2,170 E	2,054 E	8,115 E
2020	1,756 E	887 E	1,518 E	1,820 E	6,246 E
2019	1,876 A	2,288 A	2,389 A	2,228 A	8,781 A

EPS Estimates

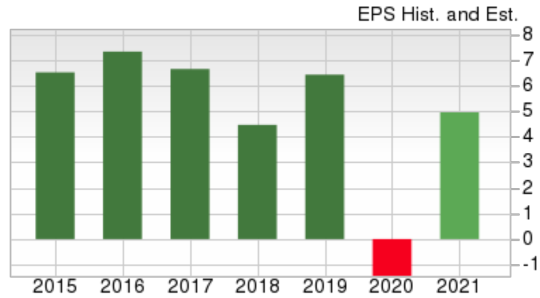
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Annual*
2021	$0.32 E	$1.88 E	$1.93 E	$0.98 E	$4.95 E
2020	-$1.17 E	-$2.08 E	$0.68 E	$1.36 E	-$1.43 E
2019	$0.17 A	$2.17 A	$2.63 A	$1.46 A	$6.42 A

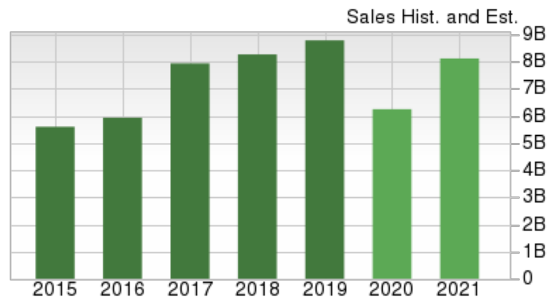
*Quarterly figures may not add up to annual.

The data in the charts and tables, including the Zacks Consensus EPS and Sales estimates, is as of 04/14/2020. The reports text is as of 04/15/2020.

Overview

Alaska Air Group, together with its partner regional carriers, serves more than 100 cities across North America. The carrier's mainline operating fleet includes multiple B737 and Airbus A320 family jets. Its regional operations include flights operated by Horizon Air, which was acquired in 1986, SkyWest and PenAir. The carrier's mainline and regional fleet strength at the end of 2019 was 237 and 95 respectively. The carrier serves 115 destinations.





Horizon Air, which serves nearly 7 million passengers annually, sells its entire capacity to Alaska Airlines under a capacity purchase arrangement. Alaska Airlines was founded in 1932. The regional fleet operated by SkyWest had 32 E175 planes at the end of 2019.

Alaska Air Group, through its mainline operations, covers western United States, Canada and Mexico. It also offers passenger and cargo services to/within Alaska.

Furthermore, the company operates on long-haul east/west routes to Hawaii and multiple cities in the mid-continental and eastern United States, primarily from Seattle.

Along with a strong fleet of passenger jets (mainline), the company boasts contracts with Horizon, SkyWest Airlines and Peninsula Airways, that are responsible for the company's regional operations. The company's objective of entering into such contracts is to receive the entire passenger revenue from such operations.

The bulk of the company's revenue is generated through passenger operations. In 2019, passenger revenues contributed 92% (of which 84.3% came from mainline operations) to the company's top line of $8,781 million. Mileage Plan and cargo and other revenues contributed 5% and 3% respectively to the company's top line in 2019..

Through its frequent flier partnerships, Alaska Air Group offers mileage credits and redemptions for members of its Mileage Plan scheme. Apart from frequent flier partnerships, the carrier also has codeshare and Interline agreements with other carriers.

Such customer-friendly arrangements boost the top line of Alaska Air Group. The acquisition of Virgin America, completed in Dec 2016, has significantly expanded Alaska Air Group's presence.

Alaska Air Group is based in Seattle, WA. The company's fiscal year coincides with the calendar year.

Reasons To Buy:

Low fuel prices should support bottom-line growth at Alaka Air.

- Even though Alaska Airlines suspended buybacks and dividends due to the present crisis, we note that the company had an impressive record of dividend payments and share repurchases prior to the outbreak. The carrier repurchased 1,192,820 shares worth roughly $75 million in 2019. Solid free cash-flow generation should lead to a further uptick in such shareholder-friendly activities. Notably, the company's free cash flow improved $750 million year over year to $1.1 billion in 2019. On another positive note, low fuel prices are expected to partly offset the adversity and aid the bottom line in turn. As fuel expenses comprise a major chunk of airline expenditure, a decline in costs is likely to boost earnings in the quarter.

- The airline's measures to reduce its debt levels are also encouraging. The carrier exited 2019 with long-term debt of $1,264 million compared with $1,617 million at the end of 2018. Additionally, debt-to-capitalization ratio was 41% compared with 47% in December 2018. During 2019, the company paid off more than $600 million of its debt. Additionally, to bolster its balance sheet amid the coronavirus-led crisis, the carrier drew down $400 million on its line of credit and closed a secured loan for $425 million

- The ratification of two five-year agreements with 5,200 airline staffs (clerical, office and passenger service employees as well as ramp service employees and store agents), represented by the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, is a positive for the company. Alaska Air Group's efforts to expand its presence along the West Coast also raise optimism in the stock.

Reasons To Sell:

- The coronavirus pandemic is taking a significant toll on Alaska Airlines. With air-travel demand for leisure stooping to an unprecedented level, the company plans to reduce capacity by 80% for April and May. With the health hazard continuing unabated, the airline expects to make “sizeable cuts” in June and beyond as well. Alaska Airlines expects demand to be significantly suppressed for the next several months. Consequently, travel demand is likely to be unexpectedly low in the usually busy summer season. As a result, the company's top line might take a huge beating.

With air-travel demand for leisure stooping to an unprecedented level, the company plans to reduce capacity by 80% for April and May.

- The carrier’s return on equity (ROE) of 19.6% compares unfavorably with the industry's average of 26.8. The unfavorable reading undercuts its growth potential.

- Due to coronavirus-induced low demand, shares of the company have slumped more than 55% since the beginning of February. With the crisis showing no signs of fading, the share price may depreciate further, dampening investor confidence in the stock. Notably, the Zacks Consensus Estimate for current-year earnings has been revised downward over the past 90 days.

Last Earnings Report

Alaska Air Group Beats on Q4 Earnings

Quarter Ending	12/2019
Report Date	Jan 28, 2020
Sales Surprise	0.34%
EPS Surprise	3.55%
Quarterly EPS	1.46
Annual EPS (TTM)	6.43

Alaska Air Group's earnings per share of $1.46 beat the Zacks Consensus Estimate by 5 cents. Moreover, the bottom line surged 94.7% year over year on low fuel costs.

Revenues came in at $2,228 million, surpassing the Zacks Consensus Estimate of $2,220.5 million. The top line also increased approximately 8% year over year. Passenger revenues — contributing 92.3% to the top line — were up 8% on a year-over-year basis.

Operating Statistics

Consolidated traffic, measured in revenue passenger miles, rose 3.9% year over year in the reported quarter. Capacity (measured in available seat miles) expanded 3.5%. Load factor (percentage of seats occupied by passengers) improved 40 basis points to 83.7% as traffic growth outpaced capacity expansion in the reported quarter.

Total revenue per available seat mile (RASM: a key measure of unit revenues) increased 4.2% year over year to 13.38 cents in the quarter under discussion. Meanwhile, yield climbed 3.7% to 14.77 cents.

Operating Expenses & Income

In the fourth quarter, total operating expenses (on a reported basis) were down 2% year over year to $1,976 million with expenses on aircraft fuel (including hedging gains and losses) declining 13%. Fuel price (economic) was $2.21 per gallon, down 6% year over year.

Expenses on wages and benefits, however, flared up 14% in the December-end quarter. Operating income increased in excess of 100% from the prior-year quarter's level to $252 million. Consolidated cost per available seat mile — excluding fuel and special items — inched up 0.7% to 9.01 cents.

Liquidity & Buybacks

At the end of 2019, the company had $ 1,521 million in cash and marketable securities compared with $1,236 million at the end of 2018.

Alaska Air exited the year with long-term debt of $1,264 million compared with $1,617 million at the end of 2018. Adjusted debt-to-capitalization ratio was 41% compared with 47% in December 2018. The carrier repurchased 1,192,820 shares worth roughly $75 million in 2019.

Q1 Outlook

The company envisions capacity to rise approximately 4% year over year in the first quarter of 2020. Additionally, non-fuel unit costs (excluding special items) are projected to be up approximately 3% for the March-end quarter. RASM is projected to increase in the 0.5-3.5% band. Meanwhile, economic fuel cost is projected at $2.21.

2020 Outlook

The company expects capacity for the full year to increase between 3% and 4% from 2019 levels. Non-fuel unit costs (excluding special items) are expected to rise roughly 2%. Meanwhile, capital expenditures are currently anticipated to be approximately $750 million in the current year

Recent News

Cpacity-Cut Updates — Apr 6, 2020

Alaska Airlines plans to reduce April and May capacity by 80% as the carrier continues to experience more than 80% decline in demand amid the coronavirus crisis. With the health hazard continuing unabated, the airline expects to make “sizeable cuts” in June and beyond as well. To cope with this deep crisis, the carrier took several cost-reduction initiatives, such as suspending dividends and buybacks, slashing officer pays through Sep 30, laying off contractors and temporary workers, reducing work time for management employees, freezing annual pay hikes and asking employees to show interest in taking leave of absence voluntarily.

The carrier also drew down $400 million on its line of credit and closed another secured loan for $425 million. It also reined in all other spending, such as on aircraft, buildings, equipment, leases etc.

Valuation

Alaska Air Group shares are down 54.2% and 49.1% in the year-to-date period and over the trailing 12-month period respectively. Stocks in the Zacks sub-industry and the Zacks Transportation sector are down 54.5% and 26.7% in the year-to-date period respectively. Over the past year, the Zacks sub-industry and the sector are down 53.7% and 26.1% respectively.

The S&P 500 index is down 14.4% and 5.6% in the year-to-date period and in the past year, respectively.

The stock is currently trading at 4.65X forward 12-month price to earnings, which compares to 15.09X for the Zacks sub-industry, 13.78X for the Zacks sector and 18.03X for the S&P 500 index.

Over the past five years, the stock has traded as high as 14.04X and as low as 3.68X, with a 5-year median of 10.32X. Our Neutral recommendation indicates that the stock will perform in-line with the market. Our $33.00 price target reflects 4.94X forward 12-month earnings.

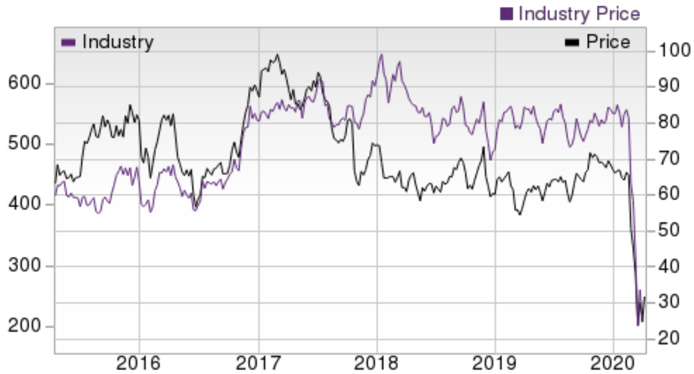
The table below shows summary valuation data for ALK

Valuation Multiples - ALK

		Stock	Sub-Industry	Sector	S&P 500
P/E F12M	Current	4.65	15.09	13.78	18.03
	5-Year High	14.04	15.09	17.05	19.34
	5-Year Low	3.68	6.6	10.47	15.19
	5-Year Median	10.32	9.11	13.16	17.45
EV/EBITDA TTM	Current	3.63	3.62	6.36	10.07
	5-Year High	10.29	7.01	11.16	12.87
	5-Year Low	3.03	3.35	5.71	8.27
	5-Year Median	6.49	5.98	7.39	10.78
P/S F 12M	Current	0.41	0.39	0.89	3.04
	5-Year High	1.89	0.98	1.42	3.44
	5-Year Low	0.33	0.39	0.85	2.54
	5-Year Median	1.1	0.77	1.21	3.01

As of 04/14/2020

Industry Analysis **Zacks Industry Rank:** Bottom 15% (215 out of 253)



Top Peers

American Airlines Group Inc. **(AAL)**	Neutral
Hawaiian Holdings, Inc. **(HA)**	Neutral
JetBlue Airways Corporation **(JBLU)**	Neutral
Ryanair Holdings PLC **(RYAAY)**	Neutral
Spirit Airlines, Inc. **(SAVE)**	Neutral
Allegiant Travel Company **(ALGT)**	Underperform
Delta Air Lines, Inc. **(DAL)**	Underperform
Southwest Airlines Co. **(LUV)**	Underperform

Industry Comparison Industry: Transportation - Airline

	ALK Neutral	X Industry	S&P 500	JBLU Neutral	LUV Underperform	SAVE Neutral
				Industry Peers		
VGM Score	C	-	-	B	C	D
Market Cap	3.81 B	2.41 B	19.79 B	2.49 B	17.99 B	950.16 M
# of Analysts	6	4.5	14	6	7	6
Dividend Yield	0.00%	0.00%	2.16%	0.00%	2.07%	0.00%
Value Score	C	-	-	B	B	A
Cash/Price	0.39	0.55	0.06	0.52	0.22	1.12
EV/EBITDA	3.29	3.07	11.74	2.83	3.97	4.01
PEG Ratio	NA	1.24	2.15	NA	608.04	NA
Price/Book (P/B)	0.88	0.65	2.65	0.56	1.83	0.42
Price/Cash Flow (P/CF)	3.13	2.16	10.40	2.44	5.11	1.63
P/E (F1)	NA	13.01	17.72	NA	2,213.27	NA
Price/Sales (P/S)	0.43	0.28	2.06	0.31	0.80	0.25
Earnings Yield	-4.61%	-2.20%	5.46%	-8.23%	0.06%	-8.86%
Debt/Equity	0.62	0.68	0.70	0.56	0.30	1.41
Cash Flow ($/share)	9.91	4.14	7.01	3.79	6.80	8.51
Growth Score	B	-	-	A	D	D
Hist. EPS Growth (3-5 yrs)	-3.84%	4.00%	10.92%	0.16%	7.94%	3.49%
Proj. EPS Growth (F1/F0)	-122.33%	-116.14%	-2.65%	-140.00%	-99.63%	-124.10%
Curr. Cash Flow Growth	28.26%	12.49%	5.93%	14.33%	-3.22%	19.78%
Hist. Cash Flow Growth (3-5 yrs)	7.14%	8.82%	8.55%	14.43%	8.55%	15.50%
Current Ratio	0.64	0.68	1.24	0.67	0.67	1.25
Debt/Capital	38.43%	47.44%	42.36%	35.83%	23.31%	58.43%
Net Margin	8.76%	6.96%	11.64%	7.03%	10.26%	8.75%
Return on Equity	19.58%	12.61%	16.74%	12.06%	23.31%	16.38%
Sales/Assets	0.68	0.64	0.54	0.71	0.85	0.57
Proj. Sales Growth (F1/F0)	-28.87%	-19.22%	0.00%	-27.16%	-28.13%	-23.45%
Momentum Score	F	-	-	F	F	F
Daily Price Chg	5.22%	0.45%	2.56%	2.33%	1.52%	4.20%
1 Week Price Chg	28.03%	17.47%	16.01%	27.01%	19.42%	33.97%
4 Week Price Chg	-4.55%	0.21%	11.39%	-2.94%	-9.07%	18.43%
12 Week Price Chg	-52.22%	-51.50%	-19.33%	-51.50%	-35.04%	-66.73%
52 Week Price Chg	-49.07%	-50.74%	-11.64%	-45.26%	-34.10%	-74.75%
20 Day Average Volume	3,596,452	178,280	3,452,738	13,957,422	10,380,066	6,667,703
(F1) EPS Est 1 week change	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
(F1) EPS Est 4 week change	-122.85%	-114.49%	-6.42%	-134.23%	-99.63%	-124.20%
(F1) EPS Est 12 week change	-120.18%	-113.70%	-8.69%	-132.17%	-99.67%	-125.27%
(Q1) EPS Est Mthly Chg	-196.64%	-198.51%	-11.08%	-229.02%	-198.51%	-163.35%

Zacks Style Scores

The Zacks Style Score is as a complementary indicator to the Zacks rating system, giving investors a way to focus on the highest rated stocks that best fit their own stock picking preferences.

Academic research has proven that stocks with the best Value, Growth and Momentum characteristics outperform the market. The Zacks Style Scores rate stocks on each of these individual styles and assigns a rating of A, B, C, D and F. We also produce the VGM Score (V for Value, G for Growth and M for Momentum), which combines the weighted average of the individual Style Scores into one score. This is perfectly suited for those who want their stocks to have the best scores across the board.

Value Score	C
Growth Score	B
Momentum Score	F
VGM Score	C

As an investor, you want to buy stocks with the highest probability of success. That means buying stocks with a Zacks Recommendation of Outperform, which also has a Style Score of an A or a B.

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