



Reagan National Airport Slot and Perimeter Rules and Exemptions Authorized in 2024

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The deadly midair [collision](#) on January 29, 2025, between a U.S. Army helicopter and an American Airlines regional jet on approach to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA) has prompted discussion over congestion and aviation safety at the airport. In May 2024, a provision in the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Act of 2024 (P.L. 118-63) authorized 10 additional daily slot exemptions at DCA. Some local residents and some Members of Congress have argued that additional flights pose safety risks and noise concerns.

Airlines flying to and from DCA are subject to slot and perimeter rules set by federal law and regulation ([49 U.S.C. §41718](#); [14 C.F.R. §93.123](#)). A *slot* is an instrument flight rules (IFR) reservation required for each takeoff or landing. By controlling the frequency of takeoffs and landings, a [slot system](#) is sometimes put in place at airports with capacity constraints to help ensure safety and optimize efficiency. DCA is federally owned, and federal law and regulation set the total number of flights that are allowed in a given period of time (e.g., hourly) at DCA. A round-trip flight serving DCA would require two slots, or a “slot pair.”

Flights to and from DCA also are restricted by a statutory “perimeter rule” that limits nonstop flights to a 1,250-mile distance unless they are granted a waiver (also known as exemption) by law. Flights of 1,250 miles or less are referred to as “within-perimeter,” while flights of more than 1,250 miles are considered “beyond-perimeter.” The perimeter rule, which dates to the opening of Washington Dulles International Airport (IAD) in the early 1960s, was originally designed to move most long-distance airline traffic serving the Washington, DC, area to IAD.

DCA is limited to a maximum of 67 hourly slots for flights both within- and beyond-perimeter. This maximum was established through a combination of federal regulations and statutes. Regulations at [14 C.F.R. §93.123](#) established 60 hourly slots at DCA; statutes have granted an additional maximum of 7 slots and have permitted slots to be used in different hours. The DCA slot rule has existed for over two decades, although the statutory limitations on the number of slots available have been modified over that period.

Prior to congressional action in 2000, all slots for flights arriving or departing DCA were required to operate within-perimeter. As part of FAA reauthorization legislation in 2000, 2003, and 2012, Congress

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collectively granted 40 beyond-perimeter daily slot exemptions at DCA (20 round trips). These 20 daily beyond-perimeter flights are being operated between DCA and the following 10 cities:

- Austin, TX (1 round trip by Southwest Airlines)
- Denver, CO (4 round trips—3 by Frontier Airlines and 1 by United Airlines)
- Las Vegas, NV (1 round trip by American Airlines)
- Los Angeles, CA (4 round trips—1 by Alaska Airlines, 2 by American Airlines, and 1 by Delta Air Lines)
- Phoenix, AZ (3 round trips by American Airlines)
- Portland, OR (1 round trip by Alaska Airlines)
- Salt Lake City, UT (1 round trip by Delta Air Lines)
- San Francisco, CA (2 round trips—1 by Alaska Airlines and 1 by United Airlines)
- San Juan, PR (1 round trip by JetBlue Airways)
- Seattle, WA (2 round trips by Alaska Airlines)

During FAA reauthorization debate in the 118th Congress, whether or not to allow additional DCA slots, including beyond-perimeter slots, generated interest from some Members of Congress and aviation stakeholders. In mid-2023, two bills, H.R. 3185 and S. 1933, were introduced that initially sought to add 56 new slots at DCA to allow 28 additional daily round-trip flights. The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, enacted on May 16, 2024, authorized 10 additional DCA slot exemptions.

Washington, DC, metropolitan area local governments and residents living near DCA or under its flight paths [generally opposed](#) an increase in slots, as it would lead to an increase in flights. Although opposition focuses primarily on the flight delays and noise impacts of additional traffic and congestion, many also expressed [concerns](#) over aviation safety as well as the potential reduction of flights serving regional airports and smaller markets within-perimeter. This is because airlines would likely use new beyond-perimeter slot exemptions for nonstop flights to big cities outside the 1,250-mile radius.

The Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority ([MWAA](#)), which operates both DCA and IAD, advocated to preserve the existing DCA slot and perimeter rules. MWAA maintained that the DC region is well served by the bigger IAD, which is located about 30 miles west of the District of Columbia in Northern Virginia and has no flight restrictions.

Delta Air Lines and other members of [the Capital Access Alliance](#) group supported the expansion, advocating that improving passenger access to the nation's capital will increase the affordability and efficiency of air travel and bring economic growth. United Airlines, which has a large operation at nearby IAD, opposed the changes as part of [the Coalition to Protect America's Regional Airports](#).

Section 502 of the 2024 FAA Reauthorization directed the Department of Transportation (DOT) to grant 10 additional daily slot exemptions at DCA, within the confines of slot control, for nonstop service between DCA and domestic airports within or beyond the 1,250-mile perimeter. In December 2024, DOT [awarded](#) two DCA slot exemptions to each of five carriers—Alaska Airlines, American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, Southwest Airlines, and United Airlines—for nonstop round-trip service to San Diego, San Antonio, Seattle, Las Vegas, and San Francisco, respectively. Airlines are required to commence the service authorized no later than March 17, 2025, according to the DOT [order](#).

Reportedly, [United](#) and [Southwest](#) are scheduled to start the new flights on February 13, 2025. The start date for the other three carriers would be in March—[American Airlines](#) on March 2, 2025; [Delta](#) on March 9, 2025; and [Alaska](#) on March 17, 2025.

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