

MYTH vs. FACT:

The Truth Behind DCA's Slot and Perimeter Rules



MYTH #1: Increasing flights at Reagan National Airport (DCA) would not materially impact congestion or delays at DCA because there are multiple blocks of time in which the airport is underutilized.¹



FACTS:

- The Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority (MWAA), the local airport authority created by Congress to make operational decisions for the airport, has repeatedly stated that DCA is at capacity.²
- The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) says DCA is more delay-prone than other airports, and estimates that adding 20 daily round trip operations would further increase delays by 25.9% while adding 25 daily round trip operations would increase delays by 33.2% at DCA.³
- DCA already averages 50-55 operations in peak hours, except between 9:00 PM and 10:00 PM, with planes taking off and landing on the same short runway.⁴ No airport – especially slot-controlled airports that operate with significant geographic and flight restrictions – can operate at peak capacity at all hours without consequences like delays, cancellations, and other disruptions.⁵
- DCA is one of only three airports in the country where the FAA uses slots to limit air traffic due to capacity constraints, and the FAA has said no more flights can be added.⁶
- Off-peak hours are necessary to recover from congestion in peak hours, preventing delays from compounding and becoming worse.
- The extra time buffer of one minute between flights identified at DCA reflects underperformance – not the ability to add more flights – as the airport's limited capacity needs added padding to facilitate timely flights.⁷



MYTH #2: The DCA Act calls for adding flights, but would not replace or eliminate any flights to regional airports.⁸



FACTS:

- The DCA Act does not protect flights to in-perimeter destinations. Any destinations within the perimeter are at risk for lost or reduced service,⁹ as airlines will be incentivized to change their short-haul routes to feed their new, more profitable long-haul service.
- Additionally, the additional 56 takeoffs and landings per day proposed by the DCA Act will bring DCA to a standstill because the airport is at capacity, more delay-prone compared to other airports, and has the busiest runway in the country. This will increase delays and disruption at DCA with a significant impact on regional airports and the passengers trying to connect to or through Washington.¹⁰



MYTH #3: The perimeter rule was enacted in 1966 to protect growth at IAD, but today it no longer needs that protection as demand for IAD has increased.¹¹

 **FACTS:**

- The perimeter rule was created to preserve DCA's intended role as a short-haul regional airport,¹² which is complemented by the long-haul flights offered at both Dulles International Airport (IAD) and Baltimore-Washington International Airport (BWI).
- The perimeter rule is also important because airlines tend to use larger aircraft to operate longer-haul flights, and DCA's runways – which are far shorter¹³ than those at IAD¹⁴ and other long-haul airports – already struggle to accommodate the larger aircraft that serve these long-haul flights.¹⁵
- IAD has the ground space and capacity to serve a far greater number of passengers than it currently handles, while DCA is already well over capacity. Both DCA and IAD serve around 24 million passengers per year. However, with minor expansions IAD's current facilities could accommodate 45 million annual passengers, while DCA is already serving 9 million more passengers per year than originally intended.¹⁶
- This is unsurprising when you look at the numbers: DCA has only 58 gates on 733 acres of land,¹⁷ compared to 135 gates on approximately 12,000 acres at IAD.¹⁸
- With DCA already at capacity, the perimeter rule is more necessary today than in the past.



MYTH #4: While 80 percent of Virginia voters are unaware of the perimeter rule,¹⁹ a clear majority will support modernizing the regulation once they realize it is costing them more time and money.

 **FACTS:**

- Virginia voters in no way benefit from changes to the slot and perimeter rules that will increase delays, cancellations, traffic, noise, and safety concerns in their community.
- This local opposition is exemplified by the strong public positions taken by lawmakers that represent these communities – among them Governor Glenn Youngkin, Sens. Tim Kaine and Mark Warner (D-VA), Sens. Chris Van Hollen and Ben Cardin (D-MD), and Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) – as well as by the 44 Virginia, D.C., and Maryland-based groups that have joined the Coalition to Protect America's Regional Airports to oppose any changes to these rules.



MYTH #5: Changing the slot and perimeter rules will improve access to the nation's capital for our armed forces, especially for those stationed in military bases in Texas and California.

 **FACTS:**

- There are more active-duty military personnel located within the perimeter – and therefore at risk of seeing lost or reduced access to Washington and longer delays and cancellations due to more flights at DCA than it can reasonably handle – than outside the perimeter.
- The District of Columbia and the 37 states located either fully or partially inside the perimeter are home to more than 718,263 active-duty military personnel, 1.5 times more than the 476,816 living in the 19 states partially or fully outside of the perimeter.²⁰

ENDNOTES

¹ FAA Data Demonstrates That DCA Has Capacity For More Flights, [Capital Access Alliance](#), 2023

² Reagan National's Runway is the Busiest in America, [Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority](#), 2023

³ Capital Access Alliance: DCA Air Service Analysis (April 2023), [Federal Aviation Administration](#), 2023

⁴ OAG published schedule as of May 4, 2023

⁵ Adding flights at Reagan National would increase delays, FAA says (June 2023), [The Washington Post](#), 2023

⁶ Slot Administration, [Federal Aviation Administration](#)

⁷ Capital Access Alliance: DCA Air Service Analysis (April 2023), [Federal Aviation Administration](#), 2023

⁸ The Truth About the DCA Act and Regional Airports, [Capital Access Alliance](#), 2023

⁹ "Information on Effects of Federal Statute Limiting Long-Distance Flights," p. 32, [U.S. Government Accountability Office](#), November 2020

¹⁰ Reagan National's Runway is the Busiest in America, [Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority](#), 2023

¹¹ Flying Beyond | DCA Air Service Analysis, [Capital Access Alliance](#), 2023

¹² DCA Reagan National – Slot & Perimeter Rules, [FlyReagan.com](#)

¹³ Airport Overview, [FlyReagan.com](#)

¹⁴ Airport Overview, [FlyDulles.com](#)

¹⁵ Anatomy: Landing a Plane at Reagan National Airport, [Washingtonian](#), 2012

¹⁶ Hoyer Joins Congressional Colleagues in Opposing Increased DCA Traffic, [Rep. Steny Hoyer](#), May 2023

¹⁷ Airport Overview, [FlyReagan.com](#)

¹⁸ About Dulles International, [FlyDulles.com](#)

¹⁹ Survey on Potential Perimeter Rule Modernization, [Co/efficient](#), 2023

²⁰ 2021 Military Active-Duty Personnel, Civilians by State, [Governing.com](#)