

AVIATION

FAA again extends slot-use waiver for international flights

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The FAA has extended relaxed rules for international schedules at seven airports, including San Francisco. Photo Credit: San Francisco International Airport

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Federal officials are again extending pandemic relief that helps big airlines keep coveted takeoff and landing rights for international flights this summer at busy airports in New York City and Washington, D.C.

The move by the FAA will let leading airlines keep their dominant positions at major airports into late October, even if they drop some international flights.

Normally, airlines that fail to use their assigned rights, or "slots," at John F. Kennedy and LaGuardia airports in New York, and Reagan National Airport outside Washington, risk losing them. However, regulators waived that rule in March 2020 when airlines cut flights due to the pandemic.

The FAA has extended the slot-use waiver four times, with the last grace period set to expire Sunday. Instead, the FAA will extend the waiver for international flights only through Oct. 29, it said in a decision scheduled to be published in the Federal Register.

The agency cited "the evolving and highly unpredictable situation globally" around COVID-19.

The FAA will also extend relaxed rules regarding flight schedules at Newark Liberty, Chicago O'Hare, Los Angeles International and San Francisco International.

The waivers were supported by the trade group for large U.S. airlines plus Lufthansa, British Airways and other big international carriers. Smaller airlines often oppose such measures, which they say make it harder for them to grow at the busiest airports.

The FAA's action comes as U.S. air travel edges closer to pre-pandemic levels.

More than 2 million people per day have passed through airport security checkpoints in March, a decline of 13% from the same month in 2019, according to government figures. Trade group Airlines for America says international travel to and from the U.S. is down 42% from 2019.

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