



MEMORANDUM

To: Interested Parties

From: Capital Access Alliance

Date: June 6, 2023

Subject: FAA Data Demonstrates That DCA Has Capacity For More Flights

An analysis of data from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) shows that Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA) has the capacity to add more flights, contradictory to information found in a recent unsigned FAA memo.

DCA operates with three low-volume periods during the day, which creates an opportunity to add additional flights during slower operating times.

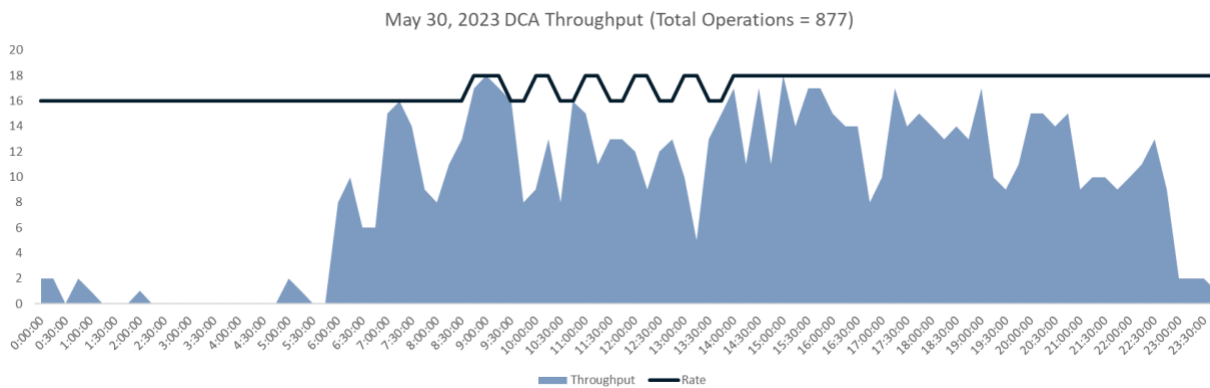
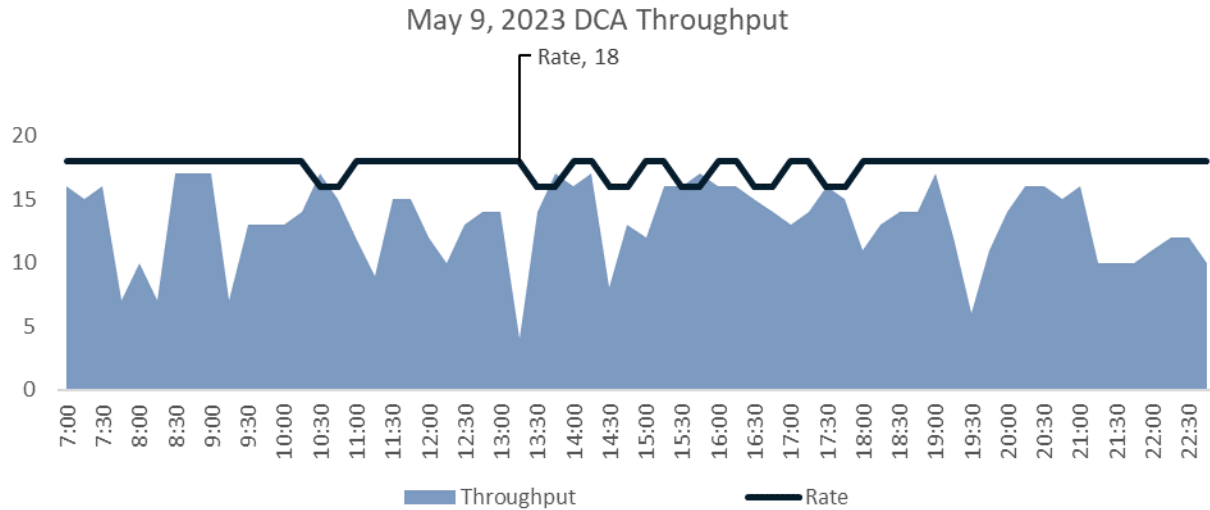
Key FAA data points:

- More than 28 flights can be added during the following time periods:
 - 7:00 – 8:45 AM
 - 10:45 AM – 1:30 PM
 - 8:45 – 10:00 PM
- These three underutilized time blocks have an average capacity of an additional 12 flights per hour.

A “called rate” by Air Traffic Control (ATC) is the average hourly capacity at an airport. The black line in the chart below depicts what the FAA’s air traffic controllers at the DCA tower could control on May 9. The chart shows a rate of 18 operations for every 15 minutes, totaling 72 flights per hour. The light blue “throughput” is the traffic that actually arrived and departed on that day in 15-minute increments.

The gaps between ATC’s capacity and the throughput show that more flights can be added. The FAA’s published best-case scenario for arrivals and departures on runway 01/19 at DCA are 36 each respectively, or 72 operations per hour. On the low end, when weather or other factors are affecting ATC, FAA projects runway 01/19 could handle 60 operations per hour.

Adding more flights would not add unnecessary delays to the airport. Airlines would work with the FAA, just as they do at other airports, to schedule additional flights during slower time periods instead of surge peak time periods.



*Data from FAA Aviation System Performance Metrics (ASPM)

[https://aspm.faa.gov/aspmhelp/index/Aviation System Performance Metrics \(ASPM\).html](https://aspm.faa.gov/aspmhelp/index/Aviation_System_Performance_Metrics_(ASPM).html)

Memorial Day Weekend 2023

To further prove this point, the 2023 Memorial Day weekend saw more air travelers than the 2019 holiday weekend. The U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) screened 12.4 million passengers, including 2.72 million on Friday – the busiest day. Peak aircraft operations at DCA hit on Tuesday, May 30, and are illustrated in the chart above. Throughout the day there continues to be gaps between the actual arrivals and departures and what rates ATC could direct.

Key considerations related to FAA ground stop data

From January 2022 to April 2023 (the same timeframe FAA analyzed), DCA ranked 35th in delays among all U.S. airports; however, the FAA memo does not highlight the full picture or consider the way in which the FAA records ground stop and ground delay programs as outlined below:

The recent FAA memo showed a small increase in delay minutes *per delayed flight* and stated DCA is in the top five airports for ground stops and ground delays. However, the number of ground stops and ground delays recorded for any airport are not reliable indicators of capacity constraint. This is because

ground stop and ground delay programs can happen for a variety of reasons and can take place anywhere from a few minutes to many hours.

For example, if a thunderstorm over DCA causes the FAA to issue a ground stop lasting several minutes, but then issues two subsequent, short ground stops due to the same thunderstorm, this would be recorded and analyzed as three separate ground stops. On the same day, an airport such as San Francisco (SFO) could have one ground stop lasting many hours affecting *all* flights, but the FAA records this as one event. This means the impact to customers flying in and out of SFO would be measurably higher than what customers at DCA would experience in the same day, even though DCA experienced several FAA recorded ground stops and SFO experienced one.

Additionally, a federally imposed perimeter rule incentivizes airlines to use regional aircraft, which on average experiences more disruptions. DCA has 25 percent more cancellations than similar metropolitan markets as a result. With better utilization, DCA can better serve its passengers.

###