

April 30, 2024

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
The U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation
254 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ted Cruz
The U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation
254 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Sam Graves
The U.S. House Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Rick Larsen
The U.S. House Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure
2165 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Chairwoman Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen:

Congress is at the threshold of passing a historic Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization bill that will have significant and far-reaching benefits to the flying public. It was undoubtedly an arduous process but the final bicameral and bipartisan compromise legislation, as led by Chairwoman and U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell, Ranking Member and U.S. Senator Ted Cruz, Chairman and U.S. Representative Sam Graves and Ranking Member and U.S. Representative Rick Larsen, includes a measure to authorize a modest increase of five new flight pairs at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA). As always, the safety of passengers and those employed by or alongside the aviation industry was at the forefront of decision making, and these added flights were examined under that same lens.

Opponents to this modest increase are mischaracterizing the operational reality at DCA, claiming that the airport is at capacity and that adding flights would be unsafe. From my vantage point as former FAA Administrator, this is not accurate. I agree with my counterparts, including [FAA Administrator Michael Whitaker](#) and [former FAA Administrator Michael Huerta](#), who have both stated that DCA does in fact have the capacity to safely add more flights. Indeed, in a February 6 hearing before the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, Administrator Whitaker pointed out that the FAA “will always make sure it’s operating safely” and that “there are some hours when there’s some room for new capacity” at DCA.

As with all other airports, aviation stakeholders manage risk and operations together. They do this daily throughout the National Airspace System and make adjustments when needed for weather or other circumstances. Airlines would work with the FAA and airport to add flights during the off-peak times at DCA, where there would be no impact to delay or safety.

The five flights negotiated are just a fraction of the previously proposed 28 flights and should be viewed as a very reasonable compromise. I have seen these negotiations unfold firsthand, and I am confident that the experts at the FAA will implement the bipartisan bicameral agreement in a thoughtful and systematic way.

Opponents of additional flights at DCA assert that this will increase delays at DCA. However, [new data](#) from the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics shows that DCA currently leads all of Washington, D.C. regional airports in on-time arrivals and departures, beating Dulles International Airport (IAD) and Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport (BWI). In fact, DCA ranked second among the 30 largest airports in the U.S. with an 82.74 percent on-time departure rate and ranked eighth nationally for arrivals with a 78.18 percent on-time rate.

These opponents of this bipartisan compromise are also attempting to thwart airline competition to the detriment of the flying public, while exploiting and mischaracterizing safety concerns to further a legislative agenda. Aviation safety is of paramount importance to the FAA and the entire aviation industry, and safety concerns should not be raised lightly or inappropriately. I know you share my view that safety is and always needs to be our top priority.

The last time slots were added at DCA was in 2012. Since then, Congress has worked with the aviation and airport sectors to invest in infrastructure and technology capabilities to implement operational improvements throughout the National Airspace System, including at DCA. The time is right to increase flights to utilize these investments. The FAA has successfully added modest capacity at DCA in the past and is capable and prepared to do so again.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for all of your hard work to support the continued improvements in the safety and efficiency of our aviation system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Dickson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "S" and "D".

Steve Dickson

18th Administrator of the FAA

Former U.S. Air Force and Commercial Pilot