



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on November 6, 2025

FAA Slashes Air Traffic by 10 Percent. More Restrictions Loom

The Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) are cutting flights. Starting Friday, November 7, the FAA will reduce traffic by 10 percent in 40 “high-volume markets.” [Officials announced](#) on Wednesday that the step is “proactive.” They cite rising fatigue among air-traffic controllers and growing staffing gaps during the government shutdown.

“We’re not going to wait for a safety problem to truly manifest itself,” FAA Administrator Bryan Bedford said. He added,



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The system is extremely safe today and will be extremely safe tomorrow. If the pressures continue to build even after we take these measures, we’ll come back and take additional measures.

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy framed the cuts as preventative. He said the “data dictated” this “hard decision.”

Airlines will pare schedules. Airports in New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles, Dallas, Miami, Orlando, Las Vegas, and others are on the early list [reported](#) by ABC News. A formal list is due from the FAA.

The directive marks one of the most significant operational slowdowns in recent U.S. aviation history, per Bedford’s admission. Analysts estimate up to 1,800 flights and 268,000 seats could be affected. Airlines are preparing rolling schedule updates and refunds.

Why Now

The strain on air-traffic controllers predates the government shutdown that began on October 1. According to the National Air Traffic Controllers Association ([NATCA](#)),

The controller workforce has been understaffed for more than a decade, resulting in mandatory overtime, including regular 10-hour days and six-day weeks. Last year, controllers at 40 percent of FAA facilities worked six days a week at least once per month. Several facilities require six-day workweeks every week.

“We are 2,000 air-traffic controllers short,” Duffy specified. Bedford has echoed the gap in hearings and briefings since taking office this summer.

The lapse in pay has added even more pressure to an already overburdened workforce. Duffy has



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spoken bluntly about the paycheck crisis. Controllers received only a partial payment in early October, followed by what he described as “a big fat zero” in the most recent pay period. He warned that another zero is likely if the stalemate continues. Many controllers, he said, are taking side jobs to cover basic expenses, while others are working longer hours to keep the system running. Reports from both local and national outlets confirm similar patterns across air-traffic control towers and centers nationwide.

Passengers

The FAA will phase in the reductions, beginning with a four-percent cut on Friday and rising to 10 percent next week.

Uncertainty remains high. [Business Insider](#) reported,

As of early Thursday morning, most airlines said they were still evaluating how their schedules would be affected.

Domestic routes will take the biggest hit. Flights operating between morning and late evening hours are expected to face the most cancellations, while international services remain largely exempt for now. Airlines will likely start by cutting regional and point-to-point flights, then adjust hub schedules as needed.

Ripple effects will follow. Aircraft and crews must be repositioned, which can trigger additional delays even for flights that remain on the board. The [Associated Press](#) warned that such last-minute adjustments complicate airline planning. Henry Harteveldt, president of Atmosphere Research Group, told the outlet,

To tell airlines you’ve got 48 hours to rebuild your schedules at 90% of what you’ve got isn’t much time, and it’s going to result in a lot of chaos.

The AP also quoted AAA spokesperson Aixa Diaz, who urged travelers to monitor flight updates through airline apps and airport social-media accounts, and to allow plenty of extra time at the airport before departure.

For now, passengers should stay alert. Reports suggest checking your airline app several times a day, watch for rebooking or refund options, and build extra time into connections. Those traveling on regional or point-to-point routes should have backup plans. These steps reflect the FAA’s phased cuts and the possibility of tighter restrictions if staffing pressures grows further.

Airlines

Policy on refunds and flexibility is expanding across carriers. [United](#), one of the largest U.S. carriers with hubs in many of the airports on the list, told customers and employees it will comply with new restrictions. As part of the adjustment, it will update schedules on a rolling basis. It will offer refunds to all travelers during the affected period, including those with non-refundable and basic-economy tickets. The airline added that it will try to preserve long-haul international and hub-to-hub routes. It added,

The focus is on schedule reductions to regional and domestic mainline flights that do not travel between our hub airports.



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Its early move is a bellwether for how other airlines may adjust.

[Delta confirmed](#) it will reduce flights in line with the FAA's policy. It posted,

We are providing additional flexibility to all of our customers during the impacted travel period to change, cancel or refund their flights, including our basic economy fares, without penalty.

Other major airlines are issuing rolling alerts and waivers as schedule changes solidify.

Airlines for America, the trade group for major U.S. airlines, said in a statement to the press,

We are working with the federal government to understand all details of the new reduction mandate and will strive to mitigate impacts to passengers and shippers.

In a Wednesday [press release](#), the group reported that since the shutdown began, staffing shortages have caused delays and cancellations affecting more than 3.4 million passengers. It urged Congress to pass a funding resolution, arguing,

It is simply unacceptable that our air traffic controllers, TSA officers and CBP officers are working without pay or that the traveling public is having to stand in hours-long security lines and experience thousands of delayed or canceled flights.

Inside the FAA's "Fix"

Hiring is up, but still far behind demand. "We surged our academy to bring more controllers into our system," Secretary Duffy said, noting a 20-percent increase in trainees over past year. To slow retirements, the department offered eligible controllers a 20-percent bonus to stay on the job. The measures have eased some pressure, but Duffy conceded it will take years before new recruits are fully certified.

Modernization is the second pillar. The administration allocated \$12.5 billion through the One Big Beautiful Bill ([OB BB](#)) to upgrade radar, telecom, and tower systems, calling it the foundation for the next generation of air-traffic management. Duffy said another \$30 billion will be required to complete the transition.

Transparency remains the missing link in the government's explanation. Neither the DOT nor the FAA has released the underlying "data" that they say prompted the nationwide flight-capacity cuts. Without access to that information, their rationale cannot be verified independently. The absence of evidence leaves open whether the reductions are a necessary response to staffing shortages or the start of a longer-term policy shift toward tighter federal control of air travel.

Officials explicitly state that the restrictions could be rolled back — or expanded — depending on the "data" they say they monitor "hourly." Yet, without that data made public, such assurances rest on trust rather than proof. Observers warn that emergency measures introduced as temporary often become institutionalized, gradually normalizing an expanded federal role in managing Americans' mobility.

For travelers, the question is no longer only when schedules will return to normal, but whether they will at all. Beneath the immediate disruption lies a deeper unease: that the growing consolidation of air



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travel under centralized, automated systems could make future restrictions easier to impose and far harder to reverse.



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