

Improving Travel During The Holidays And Beyond

President Bush Announces Expansion Of "Thanksgiving Express Lanes" And Opening Of Three New Runways To Reduce Congestion; Also Highlights Transportation Safety Record

Today, President Bush visited the Department of Transportation (DOT) and discussed measures to improve air travel, both during the upcoming holiday season and in the future, and highlighted his Administration's transportation safety record. Over the holidays, millions of Americans will take to the roads, railways, and skies to visit loved ones. For too many travelers, though, it means long delays, cancellations, and lost bags. Today the President announced new measures that bolster the Administration's those problems.

- **This year, the military is expanding "Thanksgiving Express Lanes" to areas of the Midwest, Southwest, and West Coast, including the skies over Phoenix and Los Angeles.** As they did last Thanksgiving, the Federal Aviation Administration and Department of Defense will make military airspace available for use by civilian airliners over the holiday season – but this year even more airspace will be open, and it will be available for a longer period of time.
- **The Administration has also launched an unprecedented effort to reduce air congestion by boosting flight capacity at some of America's busiest airports.** DOT has completed 13 major airport improvement projects, including 11 new runways. This week, three more runways (for a total of 14 during this Administration) will open at Seattle-Tacoma, Washington-Dulles, and Chicago-O'Hare.
- **The Administration is working with the Federal Aviation Administration and Transportation Security Administration to make more staff available to speed up check-in and boarding and to help passengers affected by cancellations and delays.**
- **DOT has completed new regulations that provide increased protections for consumers.** Recent actions include requiring airlines to provide greater compensation for lost bags and imposing tougher penalties when airlines fail to notify travelers of hidden fees. We expect these new rules to take effect in December, in time for Christmas and the New Year.
 - Next month, airlines will be required to pay travelers up to \$3,300 per lost bag, up from today's \$3,000.
 - Next month, the maximum consumer protection penalties will rise from \$25,000 to \$27,500.
- **The Administration is advancing a regulation to hold airlines accountable for how they treat passengers during long tarmac delays.** The new proposed rule would require airlines to have airport-specific plans in place to ensure that all passengers are treated appropriately during extended tarmac delays.

The Administration is also addressing the heavy air traffic around New York City, which is the source of many of the flight delays and cancellations across our country. We have improved local air-traffic control, added a new departure route from the metro area, and capped the total number of flights. DOT has just awarded nearly \$90 million over an eight-year period to upgrade existing taxiways and build new ones at John F. Kennedy International Airport. Together, these actions will help reduce flight delays across the country.

- **Starting this January, the FAA will auction takeoff and landing slots at New York airports.** This will increase competition for access to these airports, helping to lower fares for consumers. It will provide incentives for airlines to boost their efficiency and use larger planes to carry more passengers on each flight.
- **Today, President Bush signed an Executive Order to ensure that modernizing our aviation system remains a leading priority for Federal agencies.** This action strengthens DOT's coordination with other Federal agencies.
 - The EO will help transform the national air transportation system and effectively implement the NextGen Initiative (Next Generation Air Transportation System) that utilizes satellite-based guidance technology, which is safer, more secure, affordable, and environmentally friendly.

DOT Has Built An Impressive Record When It Comes To Improving Travel

Under President Bush's leadership, DOT has built a strong record on improving air travel for American consumers. During the President's time in office, the Federal government has put in place regulations to make airlines more accountable for the way they treat passengers and helped achieved important safety milestones.

- As of May, passengers who are involuntarily bumped from their flight receive double the compensation from airlines: up to \$800 if they are not rerouted to reach their destination within two hours of their original arrival time, or four hours for international flights.
- The last seven years are the safest period in commercial aviation on record.
- America is currently experiencing the lowest highway fatality rate on record.

This Administration's efforts to open international aviation markets have given our airlines new access to dozens of foreign countries and have dramatically increased service for the traveling public. Through agreements with the European Union, India, Australia, Canada, Thailand, and China, the Administration has increased flights between the United States and these countries, expanding options for passengers and shippers and creating competitive opportunities for our airlines.

DOT has also worked to safeguard our environment and promoted energy security. The energy bill President Bush signed last year will save fuel and cut greenhouse gas emissions by specifying a national fuel economy standard of 35 miles per gallon by 2020. Additionally, President Bush and his Administration are:

- Dramatically boosting our output of clean-burning biodiesel and ethanol.
- Providing tax credits for the purchase of low-emission hybrid vehicles.
- Investing in technologies like advanced batteries and hydrogen fuel cells, which will power the clean vehicles of the future.
- Making significant progress in improving fuel efficiency and reducing environmental impacts of the air transportation system.

DOT Can Be Proud Of Making Transportation Systems Safer, Cleaner, And More Effective – Yet There Is Still Much More To Be Done

Reform is needed, both in our skies and along our roads. As Members of Congress take up the next highway and aviation bills in the coming year, they should adhere to a few key principles. They should harness the power of the free market through policies like congestion pricing, which uses the laws of supply and demand to reduce traffic on our roads and in the air. They should ensure that taxpayer funds for transportation are allocated based on the true needs of the American people and economy – not spent on wasteful earmarks or the political demands of influential lobbies. They should provide incentives to leverage private investment in the private sector to develop new technologies, invest in our infrastructure, and help make our transportation system worthy of the 21st century.