REAGAN NATIONAL AIRPORT

Update on Airport's Capacity to Handle Additional Flights and Impact on Other Area Airports

What GAO Found

Reagan National Airport can accommodate some additional in capacity, but airport infrastructure constrains how much can be added. FAA officials believe that some additional slots can be added, while airport officials have not made an estimate. FAA, using the results of a 1995 DOT capacity study, determined that the airport’s airside infrastructure (e.g., runways) could accommodate four additional slots per hour. Airport officials said they were unsure how many additional slots, if any, the airport could accommodate but cited several factors that could limit the airport’s capacity to absorb additional slots including the limited number of gates currently available for loading airplanes and other infrastructure constraints. GAO’s work shows that even if the number of slots is not increased, there is some opportunity to expand current capacity by filling unused slots and increasing the size of aircraft on existing slots to increase the number of flights and the number of passengers served. Currently, nearly 80 slots are unused because they are at early morning or late evening times and airlines have not applied to use these time slots. In addition, many of the slots reserved for large passenger jets are currently being used by smaller regional jets.

Airlines awarded slots for direct flights between Reagan National and the six beyond-perimeter cities gained significant market share in those selected cities, but the effect of these slots on competing flights operating between these cities and the other Washington, D.C. area airports is not evident. For each of the six beyond-perimeter cities, the direct flights to and from Reagan National captured the majority of passengers flying between that city and Reagan National. In most cases, the airlines charged higher fares than competing connecting flights. GAO did not find evidence in passengers or fare data that would indicate that the new service between Reagan National and the six beyond perimeter cities had substantially affected service from Dulles or Baltimore-Washington International airports to these cities.

Cities Served with Additional Reagan National Airport Slots Permitted under AIR-21 and Vision 100, Both beyond and within 1,250 Miles

Source: GAO analysis of DOT documents.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Gerald Dillingham at (202) 512-4803 or dillinghamg@gao.gov.