

Airlines find it hard to spread wings at crowded La Guardia

By David Field
USA TODAY

QUEENS, N.Y. — As planes wait for permission to take off from La Guardia Airport, they form a queue of 15 or more. And on the other side of the airport, another line of arriving planes waits to get to the airport gates.

At the nation's most delayed airport, airlines have added 200 flights since spring, and, encouraged by a new law that loosened up flight limits here, they want to add 400 more.

The entire La Guardia Airport consumes only 660 acres, making it a comfortable fit inside the 880-acre terminal complex at New York's biggest airport, John F. Kennedy International. The people who run La Guardia say it simply doesn't have the runways or the gates to handle this kind of growth.

Judging by the two or three hours Arielle Kozloff Brodkey spends waiting for her plane to take off from La Guardia every week on her trip home, they may be right.

"I am routinely getting home on flights from La Guardia in Cleveland at 10 p.m. when I should be home at 7:15," says Brodkey, who works at a Manhattan art gallery during the week. "Since spring, it has been so bad and so regular that an hour delay at La Guardia is almost like being on time."

La Guardia may be a harbinger of what awaits passengers at many U.S. airports when demand over-takes capacity. Every day will be like the Sunday after Thanksgiving, one of the heaviest travel days of the year.

La Guardia shows "that huge



Rush hour: Holiday travelers crowd the ticket counters at New York's La Guardia Airport earlier this week. The airport is plagued by delays more often than any other in the nation.

portion of the delay problem presently residing below the waterline — the rest of the iceberg" elsewhere in the nation, says consultant Bob Mann of Port Washington, N.Y.

Since spring, airlines added flights here to take advantage of a federal law, dubbed AIR-21, that loosened limits on using La Guardia. The number of La Guardia flights grew from 1,064 a day as of April 1 to 1,344 as of Nov. 1 and will hit 1,395 by year's end.

La Guardia is now the source of one-fourth of all U.S. flight delays

caused by congestion.

In a peak-hour, five-minute period, 8 a.m. to 8:05 a.m., seven landings and 12 takeoffs are scheduled at the airport. But La Guardia can handle at most a combination of seven takeoffs or landings in that period, says Alfred Graser, deputy director of aviation for the airport's owner, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

Even that rate — equal to 84 takeoffs or landings an hour — is unsustainable for a full hour. "Go much over 75 operations an hour, and we just can't function," says

Graser during an interview in La Guardia's central terminal as he looks out over a rain-swept tarmac crowded with airplanes.

Above 75 operations an hour, there's a disproportionate effect as delays ratchet up.

As the airlines added flights, "we began to be alarmed in July and wrote to the airlines asking them to voluntarily adjust their schedules. 'Guys, you're going to break the airport,' we told them," Graser says. In many ways, La Guardia already is broken.

► All but two of the nation's 125

most frequently delayed flights began or ended at La Guardia in September, according to the Department of Transportation.

► In the same month, La Guardia was the destination for all eight flights that DOT listed as at least 15 minutes late every time they flew in September.

► On a recent afternoon this month, every flight-information screen in the airport's main terminal listed delays. A screen showing five of nine departing flights being late was typical.

Some La Guardia fliers are losing patience. "From the time we left the gate until we took off was 53 minutes. Progress was painful, and worse the flight was already late," says a clearly frustrated Leonard Israel of Bronx, N.Y.

Israel's flight on Spirit was due to leave here at 3:45 p.m., was delayed and "we didn't board until 4:30 and didn't leave the gate until 5 p.m.," Israel says.

La Guardia delays are felt even in the heartland.

On a flight from Kansas City to La Guardia, Richard Detingo's plane sat on the Missouri runway for an hour before taking off although "there was no congestion in there. There was nothing but blue skies and no lines of airplanes," he says.

As Graser looks out on the alleyway or taxi area, a turboprop pulls

up to the B Concourse. "We don't want that here," he says.

The airport wants only larger planes to use its limited facilities, but knows it has no legal power to require that. And it's not clear if it had the right to impose the peak-hour flight moratorium it announced in September.

After the Port Authority's requests for voluntary airline rescheduling didn't work, the airport unilaterally decided in September to impose a moratorium on new flights in the morning and afternoon rush hours. That set the stage for a showdown that was averted only when the Federal Aviation Administration stepped in.

The FAA and the Port Authority decided on Nov. 8 to institute a lottery that would award airlines numbers to determine the order in which they'll pick landing and takeoff times.

However, that is only a temporary fix, agree the FAA, the Port Authority and the airlines.

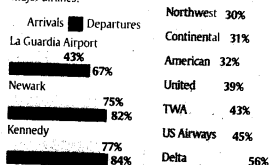
Under the lottery, airlines would be limited to a total of 150 new daily flights and some would have to cease flights, says the FAA's William Shumann.

That would be fine with Brodkey, the Cleveland commuter.

"I can't understand why all these new flights were allowed to be added," she says.

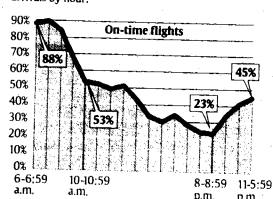
Newark and Kennedy are better

La Guardia is well behind other New York-area airports for on-time flight arrivals and departures by major airlines:



Afternoons, evenings are worst

After midday, half or fewer of all major airline flights arrive at La Guardia on time. Percentage of on-time arrivals by hour:



Note: All figures based on September data.

Source: Department of Transportation.

By Marcy F. Mullins, USA TODAY

Lottery to decide slots at La Guardia

By David Field
USA TODAY

A game of chance may not seem the soundest way to distribute a scarce and valuable commodity, but for the airlines that want to serve New York's close-in La Guardia Airport, a proposed Federal Aviation Administration lottery of landing slots may be the only way.

The lottery that the FAA plans to conduct as early as next week would divvy up La Guardia takeoff and landing rights for use from Jan. 1 to Sept. 15. Meanwhile, the FAA plans to work on a more comprehensive system of easing congestion.

The FAA would conduct the lottery along with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which owns La Guardia, JFK and Newark airports.

Under the plan, flights at La Guardia would increase by about 150 a day to an average of 75 an hour. That hourly average would be lower than the 106 hourly rate that would be needed to accommodate all the requests airlines have made for La Guardia slots.

The FAA landing-slot lottery would apply only to flights already added or proposed to be added under an aviation bill passed in April. Other flights, such as the Northeastern shuttles flown by Delta and US Airways, would not be affected, nor would flights by airlines that had La Guardia landing rights before the bill was passed.

The FAA lottery would occur in four rounds. In each round, an airline would pick a number that will allow it to choose a specific landing or takeoff time. In essence the lottery establishes a pecking order.

So that new and small airlines will not lose the landing rights that Congress wanted them to have when it passed the new law, the first round will be for new airlines and carriers that now have fewer than 20 La

IF YOU'VE GOT A POCKET,
YOU'VE GOT MAIL.



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