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Docket Operations, M-30
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Room W12-140
West Building Ground Floor
Washington, DC 20590-0001

RE: Operating Limitations for Unscheduled Operations at John F. Kennedy International Airport and Newark Liberty International Airport; Docket Number FAA-2008-0629

The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), representing more than 414,000 general aviation members nationwide, opposes the introduction and implementation of Visual Flight Rules (VFR) slot reservations for unscheduled operations into John F. Kennedy International (JFK) and Newark Liberty International (EWR) Airports. AOPA strongly recommends that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) suspend the plans to impose a slot reservation system on unscheduled operations.

AOPA Opposes VFR Slot Reservations

Implementing a slot reservation system for VFR operations has not been justified and AOPA contends that the adverse impact on access more than outweighs any potential benefit in reducing delays and congestion at JFK and EWR. Historically, only Instrument Flight Rules (IFR) unscheduled operations have been included in the FAA's Airport Reservation system. This is an important principle that should be continued at all slot-controlled airports, including EWR and JFK. Air traffic control typically will only permit VFR access during times when traffic permits.

Despite referenced similarities between the unscheduled arrivals into Chicago's O'Hare International Airport (ORD), LaGuardia International Airport (LGA) and Special Traffic Management Program (STMP), VFR operations are NOT currently captured under any of those aforementioned procedures.

Proposed Plan Lacks Sufficient Analysis or Justification

The FAA has failed to provide data that justifies the severe limitations imposed on the unscheduled operations at JFK and EWR, especially in light of recent announcements by airlines that they intend to reduce operations across the country. Instead, the agency is blindly moving forward with plans to eliminate flexibility of the general aviation users at both airports without evaluating or addressing the impacts of such a significant access reduction.

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The agency has ignored the potential impact of offloading approximately 20,000 operations to adjacent airports that may not be prepared to handle additional capacity or demand. In efforts to manage congestion created by air carrier scheduling practices at the New York area airports, the FAA has failed to fully examine the implications of implementing restrictions on unscheduled operations and including VFR operations into a slot reservation program.

Flexibility and Access for General Aviation Must be Maintained

AOPA contends that the proposal to limit unscheduled operations to 1-2 operations hourly is a blatant dismissal of the need for flexibility and access to airports in the New York area. According to FAA air traffic data, general aviation accounts for less than four percent of total operations at EWR and less than two percent at JFK. It is imperative that unscheduled operators maintain access during constrained hours. AOPA contends that unscheduled VFR operators are being penalized for the scheduling practices of other airport users resulting in the FAA acting unilaterally and without justification to implement a reservation system for unscheduled operations regardless of the impacts to users or the air traffic system as a whole.

Prior to implementation of the proposed slot reservation system, the FAA must engage the industry in an effort to coordinate a suitable plan that is designed to accommodate the needs of general aviation.

Sincerely,



Andrew V. Cebula
Executive Vice President
Government Affairs