

American Airlines cutting flights as summer season starts

June 22 2021, by David Koenig



This June 2, 2021 photo shows an American Airlines aircraft at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport in Arlington, Va. American Airlines is cutting flights to protect its network from getting overloaded as summer travel season arrives. American scrubbed more than 130 flights by Tuesday, June 22 according to tracking service FlightAware. Credit: AP Photo/Jenny Kane

American Airlines will cut hundreds of flights over the next three weeks to avoid overloading its operation as demand for summer air travel rises faster than once expected.

Spokeswoman Sarah Jantz said Tuesday that the cuts could average 50 to 60 flights a day the rest of June and between 50 and 80 a day in the first half of July. That is potentially more than 1% of American's schedule.

On Tuesday, the airline had scrubbed about 130 flights by late afternoon Central time, according to tracking service FlightAware. Jantz said up to 40 were due to bad weather.

Jantz said the cuts are "building in additional resilience and certainty to our operation." She said American is making the most cuts on routes where it has multiple flights to provide options for rebooking passengers.

The union representing American's pilots said company management failed to move quickly enough to retrain 1,600 pilots who were temporarily sidelined last year or replace some of the 1,000 who took early retirement.

American and other U.S. airlines have been barred from furloughing workers during the pandemic as a condition of billions they received in federal aid to help cover payroll. American and United furloughed thousands of workers in October, when the aid and the ban on furloughs expired, then brought them back in December when Congress renewed the pandemic relief.

American's management "did not maintain its own infrastructure in preparation for our industry's recovery," said Eric Ferguson, president of the Allied Pilots Association. The union has since found ways to fix "the pilot training and staffing shortfalls that the airline now faces," he said.

Jantz said American has reserve employees it can use, but stormy summer weather in places like Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport and Charlotte Douglas International Airport in North Carolina can cause crews to exceed federal limits on how long they can work. She said the airline is also affected by labor shortages at vendors that provide catering drivers and people who push wheelchairs.

The cutbacks come as leisure travel is picking up. With more Americans vaccinated against COVID-19 and states easing travel restrictions, airports are busy again. More than 2 million travelers passed through U.S. airport security checkpoints Sunday and again Monday, with Sunday's crowds marking the highest number in 15 months, although still below 2019 levels.

American had scheduled around 5,800 flights a day through July, about 87% of its schedule for the same period in 2019, according to data from aviation researcher Cirium.

The airline industry's difficulties this month haven't been limited to American, which is based in Fort Worth, Texas. Last week, technology problems caused Dallas-based [Southwest Airlines to delay several thousand flights](#) and cancel hundreds more. Over 800 Southwest flights were running behind on Tuesday, according to FlightAware, far more than at any other airline. Southwest blamed bad weather.

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