

FAA Statement



Federal Aviation Administration, Washington, DC 20591

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FAA Statement on MSP air traffic procedures

On Friday, July 24, the Federal Aviation Administration temporarily suspended certain operations on Runway 30-Left and Runway 35 at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

This suspension is not the result of a specific event. It is based on a National Transportation Safety Board recommendation to modify arrival and departure procedures at airports with runway configurations that create intersecting flight paths. These intersecting paths pose potential risks if a landing aircraft discontinues its approach and must go around, crossing the departure flight path for the other runway.

This suspension reduces the airport's capacity to receive arriving aircraft when flights are landing and departing in a northerly direction. Using these new procedures, the maximum hourly arrival rate is between 60 and 64 aircraft, down from a previous maximum of 90 aircraft. The FAA and the National Air Traffic Controllers Association are evaluating options to increase arrival and departure rates while adhering to the new safety measures.

Background:

Converging Runway Operations

A non-intersecting converging runway operation occurs when the flight paths of two aircraft intersect but the runways themselves do not. This "intersection" in the sky poses potential risks if a landing aircraft must discontinue its approach and go around. This action could bring the airplane too close to an aircraft departing from the other runway, risking a mid-air collision.

Based on a National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) recommendation issued on

July 1, 2013 regarding converging runway operations, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) required air traffic control at airports with this configuration to modify arrival and departure procedures. The new requirements for converging runway operations stem from FAA analysis of aircraft go-around events between 2011 and 2013 that showed reduced safety margins between some arriving and departing aircraft.

The FAA used a phased-in approach nationally, which began in January 2014, to introduce these safety requirements at airports identified by the NTSB. Some of the airports that have changed their operations include Baltimore, Boston, Charlotte, Chicago O'Hare, Dallas-Ft. Worth, Denver, Houston Intercontinental, Las Vegas, Memphis, New York JFK, Philadelphia, Salt Lake City, Tampa and Washington Dulles. Prior to the phasing in of the safety requirements outlined by the NTSB, FAA personnel at Minneapolis had completed a Safety Risk Management Document that appeared to address the risks associated with converging runway operations, specifically landing Runway 35 and departing Runway 30L. In late July 2015, we determined that the mitigations in the Safety Risk Management Document were not sufficient to meet the standards of the Converging Runway requirement and the procedure was terminated. There was no event that occurred that caused this termination.

Minneapolis – St. Paul International Airport (MSP)

The immediate solution for MSP (while in a Northwest Flow Configuration) is to prohibit landings on Runway 35 when departures are occurring on Runway 30L. MSP is in a Northwest Flow approximately 60 percent of the time. This restriction results in an arrival rate reduction of up to 30 percent when in this configuration.

These amended procedures will stay in place while the FAA and the National Air Traffic Controllers Association evaluate ways of increasing capacity while safely complying with the Converging Runway Requirements. The redesign of the current Arrival-Departure Window could provide an additional needed margin of safety to use Runway 35 for additional arrivals. FAA will continue to focus on increasing the arrival and departure rates while adhering to the new safety requirements.

Questions & Answers

Will these new adjustments for Converging Runway Operations increase delays at Minneapolis – St. Paul International Airport?

A: The current daytime schedule at MSP should be able to absorb most of the reductions in maximum arrival rates. The most noted exception in the typical weekday arrival demand is between 5:45 p.m. and 6:45 p.m. The arrival demand during this timeframe exceeds the arrival rate that can be safely handled with the revised Converging Runway Procedures so delays may occur. To maintain safety, the FAA moderates the number of arrivals entering the airspace which results in delays.

How much could delays increase?

A: The FAA will evaluate the changes during the coming months to determine the extent of any delays. We are developing additional tools to increase arrival rates while still adhering to the new safety requirements.

Will the FAA increase arrival or departures from other runways to address the restriction on arrival on Runway 35?

A: While there will be no changes to the routes aircraft fly when arriving, there will be additional arrivals on Runway 30L and 30R when in a Northwest Flow. This increase is a result of the restriction of arrivals on Runway 35.

To address the reduction in arrival rates while still adhering to the prohibition of Converging Runway Operations outlined above, the FAA may, at times restrict departures to only Runway 30R. This would result in allowing arrivals on Runway 30L and Runway 35. This would occur only during a Northwest Flow. There will be no changes to current operations when in a Southeast Flow.

Will these changes to operations alter the noise patterns around MSP?

A: The FAA is assessing the environmental impact of these modifications to determine if they will have significant effect on noise.

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