AMERICAN ECONOMIC LIBERTIES PROJECT

Making Billionaires Pay Their Fair Share: How Private Jet Travel Congests America's Airports

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"Private jets are increasingly replacing car trips — for the ultra-wealthy."
– National Geographic[1]

"If Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones flies ten of his cronies to Washington in his Gulfstream V jet to see the Commanders play, he would pay about 1/10 of what American Airlines would pay for 190 passengers in an Airbus A321. Both planes have the same ATC 'footprint.' This is beyond stupid. American travelers deserve better."
– Aviation Professor Rob Britton[2]

I. Introduction

Last September, the Senate held a hearing on the state of America's airlines. There were the common complaints of delays and poor customer service. The most intriguing testimony, however, was a little-noticed comment by the then-CEO of Frontier Airlines, Barry Biffle. He fingered an unusual culprit for the woes facing both passengers and airlines: private aircraft. These entities, he said, were clogging up airports and quietly leading to delays for ordinary passengers.[3]

The FAA does not collect data on how often private jets cause delays, but Biffle claimed the problem was pervasive and serious. Private jets "game the system" by fudging scheduled departure times and taking off earlier than airlines when there are air traffic control delay programs. "Sadly, airlines often end up having to cancel because these delays stack up and time out our crews," Biffle said.[4]

[1] Olivia Ferrari, "Private jets are increasingly replacing car trips—for the ultra-wealthy," National Geographic, November 7, 2024, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/private-jet-flights-climate-change.

[2] LinkedIn, Rob Britton, https://www.linkedin.com/in/rob-britton-5393742/recent-activity/all/.

[3] U.S. Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Antitrust, Competition Policy, and Consumer Rights, "Examining Competition in America's Skies," September 30, 2025, https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/committee-activity/hearings/examining-competition-in-americas-skies.

[4] Christy Rakoczy, "Frontier Airlines CEO shares secret reason flights get canceled," Yahoo!, October 16, 2025, https://finance.yahoo.com/news/frontier-airlines-ceo-reveals-hidden-221700857.html.

We all know that flying can be a miserable experience,[5] and it is only getting worse.[6] Although there are many factors behind increasing airfares and declining service,[7] Biffle's comments show that the rise of private jets is increasingly contributing to the woes of American flyers. Private jets operate at some of the largest, most congested airports in the country, and do so in a way that causes significant problems and costs for the rest of us.

While airline passengers are charged exorbitant fees and experience delays without any recourse from air carriers and few guarantees from the Department of Transportation,[8] the uber-wealthy, C-suite executives, celebrities, and others who either own, operate, or fly on private jets benefit from unequal rules and regulations. These individuals are able to skip lines, schedule their own takeoff time, and land as close as possible to their final destination, all while producing outsized carbon footprints. And they often do so by using publicly funded infrastructure and resources without paying for it — unlike all other airline passengers.

As detailed below, the number of private jets flying in recent years — particularly in American skies — has increased, thanks to government and market incentives that have made it more enticing for the rich to avoid the hassles of commercial airlines.

This week, as thousands descend upon Santa Clara, California, for Super Bowl LX, the super-rich will be swarming in on private jets, just as they do when attending other A-list events like the World Economic Forum in Davos; the Cannes Film Festival; the FIFA World Cup; and — ironically enough — the United Nations climate negotiations. Together, these five venues recently totaled 3,500 private jet arrivals in one year (while producing 35,600 tons of carbon pollution).[9]

This paper explains how private jets are crowding skies and congesting airports, including what political and policy considerations are exacerbating the problem. Key findings include:

- Private jets clog some of our most congested airports, even airports at which the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) tightly controls takeoff and landing "slots."
- Taxpayers are getting ripped off by millionaires and billionaires flying private jets and not contributing equitably to airport user fees.
- President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill included a 100% bonus depreciation on private jets for tax purposes, exacerbating the problem.

We detail why all this matters, and how to reform rules and regulations so that private jet travel is conducted in a way that makes flying fairer. This can be achieved by reforming airport leases,

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[5] Josh Hirschfeld-Kroen, Paula Pecorella, and Sam Quigley, "Why Air Travel Sucks (And Might Get Worse)," More Perfect Union, March 7, 2023, https://perfectunion.us/why-air-travel-sucks-and-might-get-worse/.

[6] Allison Morrow, "Flying is getting worse, if you can believe it," CNN, March 12, 2025, https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/12/business/flying-gets-worse-nightcap.

[7] William J. McGee and Ganesh Sitaraman, "How to Fix Flying: A New Approach to Regulating the Airline Industry," American Economic Liberties Project and Vanderbilt Policy Accelerator, January, 2024, https://www.economicliberties.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/20240124-AELP-airlines-v5.pdf.

[8] Reuters, "Trump administration drops plan to require passenger compensation for delayed flights," CNN, November 15, 2025, https://www.cnn.com/2025/11/15/us/trump-administration-compensation-flight-disruptions-hnk.

[9] Stefan Gossling, Andreas Humpe, and Jorge Cardoso Leitao, "Private aviation is making a growing contribution to climate change," Communications Earth & Environment, Article 666, 2024, https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01775-z.

introducing equitable fee structures, and restricting private jet travel at the most congested facilities.

I. Crowded Skies: The Growth of Private Jet Travel

A. What Is Private Jet Travel?

The FAA classifies airplane operations in several ways, based on type and size of aircraft, and whether or not passengers are charged for flying. There are two terms that are often used to refer to air travel offered by providers other than commercial airlines: "general aviation" (GA) and "private jets." Although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, GA is actually an umbrella term that encompasses not only private jets flown by the wealthiest Americans but also a wide range of other types of aviation operations, for both work and leisure pursuits, as well as government agencies and first responders. What these all have in common: they are not large, scheduled, and charter commercial airline operations.

The bulk of GA involves private pilots operating both propeller-driven and jet aircraft, largely at smaller GA airports. They are, for the most part, not the subject of this paper. That is because fees at the larger commercial airports are prohibitive to many flyers who are not in the billionaire class. Texas A&M Transportation Institute reports there are 221,000 general aviation aircraft in the U.S., and they generate 132,000 flights per day. Nationwide, this translates to 59% of all civil aviation hours and 80% of all takeoffs and landings.[10]

Private jets are a subset of GA that serve the generally wealthy, corporate, and VIP users of small jets. Although many FAA policies and official data treat these groups as a single GA entity, this paper focuses specifically on private jets, because they have an outsized negative impact by often clogging commercial airports without contributing equally to the costs of air traffic control and airport access.

B. Private Jet Travel Is at Record Levels

The year 2025 was a record year for private jet travel worldwide. According to WingX, an aviation data company, in October 2025, there were 348,000 departures globally — the highest monthly number ever — with 70% of those flights departing in the United States. Longer term, the industry has been growing since before COVID-19 and is expected to post revenues of $32 billion for the year. Analysts estimate this will increase to $37 billion by 2028.[11]

This growth has led to cottage industries for those selling, leasing, and renting jet aircrafts, as well as companies offering fractional ownership shares in private planes, and a boom in executive compensation via air travel. The wealthiest Americans are increasingly opting out of the commercial flying system: a recent report found the median income of fractional owners is $140 million, while

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[10] Texas A& Transportation Institute, "What is General Aviation," June 23, 2025, https://aviation.tti.tamu.edu/2025/06/23/what-is-general-aviation/.

[11] Justin Foster, "Privaet Jet Flight Activity Analysis – 2025 – Week 44," Private Jet Card Comparisons, November 6, 2025, https://privatejetcardcomparisons.com/2025/11/06/private-jet-flight-activity-analysis-2025-week-44/; Aircraft Performance Group, "Why More Travelers Are Choosing Business Jets in 2025: Efficiency, Flexibility, and Control," August 26, 2025, https://flyapg.com/blog/private-jet-travel-growth-2025; Tajammul Pangarkar, "Business Jets Statistics By Best at Flying Segments," January 21, 2026, https://scoop.market.us/business-jets-statistics/.

full owners of private jets have a median income of $190 million.[12] The wealthy even use WhatsApp to coordinate sharing private jet transportation to travel to beaches and ski resorts.[13]

C. Why Is Private Jet Travel Soaring?

A combination of social status, lifestyle, convenience, and executive compensation packages have caused private jet usage to soar.[14] Those flying private are able to fly in luxury, while saving time and skipping Transportation Security Administration (TSA) screening and long lines. They can schedule their own departure times; in many cases, depart nearly whenever they want; and land closer to their final destination than they could if flying commercial.[15]

Major events

A number of popular events attract uber-wealthy, high-profile attendees, including major sporting events,[16] conferences and negotiations, concerts, and festivals.[17] Those with money and access frequently use private jets to get to these gatherings. As a result, these events offer great insight into the disparity that exists between the uber-wealthy and ordinary people, and how these private jets offer convenience for a few at the price of inconvenience for many, while using valuable resources to achieve marginal convenience.

The Super Bowl is typically "one of the busiest private jet weekends of the year," and 2025 was no different. There were just over 600 arrivals and nearly 600 departures from the New Orleans area — five times higher than the average daily departures of private jets for the month of February.[18] The Kentucky Derby in Louisville, Kentucky, is another highly sought-after event, and in 2023, there were over 1,500 private jets in the surrounding airports — 13 times higher than the daily average.[19]

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[12] Institute for Policy Studies and Patriotic Millionaires, "High Flyers 2023: How Ultra-Rich Privaet Jet Travel Costs the Rest of Us and Burns Up Our Planet," May, 2023, https://ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/High-Flyers-2023-Report.pdf.

[13] Andrew Zucker, "The Secret Group Chats Where the Rich Score Seats on Private Jets," The Wall Street Journal, July 9, 2025, https://www.wsj.com/style/private-jet-group-chats-whatsapp-f2785468.

[14] Stefan Gossling, Andreas Humpe, and Jorge Cardoso Leitao, "Private aviation is making a growing contribution to climate change," Communications Earth & Environment, Article 666, 2024, https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01775-z; Seth Borenstein, "Carbon pollution from high-flying rich in private jets soars," PBS News, November 7, 2024, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/carbon-pollution-from-high-flying-rich-in-private-jets-soars.

[15] The Aviation Factory, "11 Reasons Why Flying Private is Worth It – Private Jet Advantages," September, 29, 2021, https://www.the-aviation-factory.com/en/blog/reasons-why-flying-private-is-worth-it/.

[16] FTS, "Top 10 Sporting Events That Attract the Most Private Jet Traffic," March 21, 2025, https://ftsaero.com/top-10-sporting-events-that-attract-the-most-private-jet-traffic/.

[17] Inflight Chef Delight, "Top 10 global events attracting private jets," June 28, 2024, https://www.inflightchefdelight.com/post/top-10-global-events-attracting-private-jets.

[18] Nick Copley, "How Many Private Jets Fly to the Super Bowl?," Sherpa Report, February 18, 2025, https://www.sherpareport.com/aircraft/many-private-jets-super-bowl.html.

[19] Aircraft Performance Group, "Jet-Set Showdown: The Ultimate Luxury Weekend at the Kentucky Derby and Miami Grand Prix," May 1, 2025, https://flyapg.com/blog/2025-kentucky-derby-and-miami-grand-prix.

The Ryder Cup golf competition, which took place in New York in 2025, brought in as many as 3,000 private flights.[20]

It's not just sports. As an academic study detailed, travel between major events attracts a significant amount of private jet usage. From 2022 to 2023, just five events resulted in 3,500 private jet flights, producing over 35,000 tons of carbon pollution.[21] This included individuals traveling to the World Economic Forum in Davos, the Cannes Film Festival, the Super Bowl in Phoenix, the United Nations climate negotiations in Dubai, and the FIFA World Cup in Qatar. According to this report, 172 planes at Davos also took attendees to Cannes, while 96 jets flew attendees to both the Dubai climate negotiations and the World Cup.[22]

Executive compensation

Personal aircraft usage has also become a notable and growing aspect of executive compensation in recent years, which contributes to clogging already congested airports.[23]

In nearly every industry in the U.S., the largest companies are spending ever-greater company resources on private flight for executives. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, executive use of company jets for personal travel has increased 50%,[24] and corporate spending on these flights increased 19% between 2021 to 2024.[25] And in 2023, nearly half of all S&P 500 companies offered personal use of company aircraft to CEOs, while about a third offered it to other executive officers.[26] This includes some of the wealthiest executives in the world, such as Tim Cook (Apple), Jeff Bezos (Amazon), and Mark Zuckerberg (Meta),[27] who choose not to pay for their own travel and instead receive it as part of their compensation.

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[20] Madeline Berg and Lakshmi Varanasi, "Hundreds of private jets have crowded Island airport for the Ryder Cup," Business Insider, September 27, 2025, https://www.businessinsider.com/ryder-cup-golf-private-jets-new-york-celebrities-trump-2025-9.

[21] Stefan Gossling, Andreas Humpe, and Jorge Cardoso Leitao, "Private aviation is making a growing contribution to climate change," Communications Earth & Environment, Article 666, 2024, https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01775-z.

[22] *Id.*

[23] Glass Lewis, "The Resurgence of Executive Perquisites: Overview & Aircraft Costs," April 24, 2025, https://www.glasslewis.com/article/the-resurgence-of-executive-perquisites-overview-aircraft-costs.

[24] Shannon Thaler, "Personal use of corporate jets has soared 50% as companies spend $65M on perk for execs," New York Post, January 16, 2024, https://nypost.com/2024/01/16/business/personal-use-of-corporate-jets-has-soared-50-costs-companies-65m/.

[25] Max Knoblauch, "US corporate spending on private flights for executives has ballooned in recent years," Sherwood, October 9, 2025, https://sherwood.news/power/us-corporate-spending-on-private-flights-for-executives-has-ballooned-in/.

[26] Michael Bowie and Jessica Yu, "S&P 500 companies exploring what works for their executive perks," WTW, April 18, 2024,https://www.wtwco.com/en-us/insights/2024/04/s-p-500-companies-exploring-what-works-for-their-executive-perks.

[27] Paramount Business Jets, "Companies With Privaate Jets & Their Executives: An Inside Look," July 8, 2025, https://www.paramountbusinessjets.com/blog/companies-and-ceos-with-private-jets; Alex Weprin, "From Private Jets to Security Spending: Breaking Down Hollywood CEO Perks," The Hollywood Reporter, October 31, 2023, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/hollywood-ceo-perks-private-jets-free-internet-more-1235629498/.

D. Where Do Private Jets Operate?

Although the FAA does not provide specific breakdowns of commercial flights vs. private jets nationwide, our focus is on America's most congested airports. In a detailed section below, we demonstrate that the FAA allows access to private jets at the expense of smaller and low-fare airlines at the busiest commercial airports.

II. Political and Tax Policy Choices Exacerbate Private Jet Travel

Trump's tax cut for private jets

In the summer of 2025, congressional Republicans[28] and President Trump granted the private jet industry unprecedented tax breaks in the One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBB) Act[29] Those buying and renting private jets now receive a 100% bonus depreciation for tax purposes, which reduces taxable income and increases cash flow. This has led to a surge in the purchase and rental of private jets by the wealthiest Americans.[30] As Bloomberg explained, "[b]onus depreciation was previously expanded under Trump's [first] tax overhaul, which temporarily allowed 100% write-offs on qualifying assets. That perk began shrinking by 20 percentage points each year after 2022–meaning a $10 million plane bought in 2023 could generate an $8 million deduction, while one bought in 2024 would yield $6 million. The new law restores the full 100% deduction *permanently*."[31]

These tax breaks incentivizing private jet purchases and private travel stand in stark contrast to the Biden administration's actions in the area. For example, in March 2024, then-Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary Pete Buttigieg announced a proposal in the fiscal year 2025 budget that attempted to ensure private operators paid their fair share for use of the national airspace. Specifically, the administration sought to "crack down on a corporate jet funding loophole" by increasing the fuel surcharge tax from $0.22 per gallon of jet fuel to $1.06.[32] However, that proposal — like others before it —did not make it into law. More recently, Sen. Edward Markey (D-MA)

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[28] U.S. House of Representatives, 119th Congress, 1st Session, Roll Call 190, Bill Number H.R.1, July 3, 2025, https://clerk.house.gov/Votes/2025190; GovTrack.us, Senate Vote #372, "H.R.1: An act to provide for reconciliation pursuant to title II of H. Con. Res. 14.," July 1, 2025, https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/119-2025/s372.

[29] U.S. House of Representatives, "H.R.1: An act to provide for reconciliation pursuant to title II of H. Con. Res. 14.," https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1/text.

[30] Notably, it has also led to a boom in other acquisitions such as car washes and gas stations. *See*, *e.g.*, Sophie Alexander, "Private Jets and Car Washes Are the Latest Tax Shields for the Ultrarich," Bloomberg, October 27, 2025, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2025-10-27/trump-tax-law-fuels-surge-in-jet-and-car-wash-purchases.

[31] *Id.*; Global Charter, "Private Jet Charter, Globablly," https://www.globalcharter.com/.

[32] U.S. Department of Transportation, "Statement by Secretary Buttigieg on the President's Fiscal Year 2025 Budget," March 11, 2024, https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/statement-secretary-buttigieg-presidents-fiscal-year-2025-budget; OpenSecrets, "National Business Aviation Assn," 2024, https://www.opensecrets.org/federal-lobbying/clients/summary?cycle=2024&id=D000054186; OpenSecrets, "National Business Aviation Assn," 2024, https://www.opensecrets.org/political-action-committees-pacs/the-peter-norbeck-leadership-pac/C00319723/summary/2024.

reintroduced the Fueling Alternative Transportation with a Carbon Aviation Tax ("FATCAT"), which would raise the tax from $0.22 to $2.00. To date, this bill has not been adopted.[33]

Commercial passengers currently pay a 7.5% tax on the prices of their tickets plus a passenger facility charge of up to $4.50, while private jet users only pay fuel surcharge taxes. Recently, private jets contributed just 0.6% of the taxes that made up the Airport and Airway Trust Fund, while accounting for 7% of flights handled by the FAA.

Members of Congress

Some members of Congress frequently benefit from this unfair system, which may play a role in the lack of interest in introducing reforms. A number of members are licensed pilots,[34] and even more travel by private jets on a frequent basis.[35] In January 2025, it was reported that Sen. Jim Justice (R-WV) would be flying by private jet between Washington, D.C., and his district temporarily, but an investigation from October revealed that he was still flying a private jet between Lewisburg, WV, and slot-controlled Reagan National Airport on a daily basis.[36]

III. Addressing the Most Congested Airports

After President Carter signed the Airline Deregulation Act in 1978, the major domestic carriers began building dozens of hub operations at airports nationwide (and worldwide in some cases). Deregulation, coupled with widespread consolidation through mergers and bankruptcies, led to severely congested airports, as detailed at length below.[37]

Airline mergers and consolidation have created an oligopoly of the Big Four carriers —American, Delta, Southwest, and United — which control an unprecedented 80% of the market. The majors work hard to prevent meaningful competition from smaller, low-fare airlines. And as we will show, at congested airports, private jets only exacerbate such problems.[38] An MIT study found that base fares

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[33] Kerry Lynch, "Markey Reintroduces Business Jet 'Fat Cat' Tax Bill," AIN Online, February 24, 2025, https://www.ainonline.com/aviation-news/business-aviation/2025-02-24/markey-reintroduces-business-jet-fat-cat-tax-bill.

[34] Mike Collins, "GA in the Halls of Congress," AOPA, June 1, 2010, https://www.aopa.org/news-and-media/all-news/2010/june/01/ga-in-the-halls-of-congress.

[35] Douglas Pasternak, Lisa Myers and the NBC Investigative Unit, "Politicians are frequent fliers on corporate jets," NBC News, May 9, 2006, https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna12616010; Arthur Kane, "Congressional Perks: Congress spends on pricey airfare, lodging and private jets," The Center Square, November 5, 2025, https://www.thecentersquare.com/national/article_ac8834ed-5d37-47bc-8648-a8701fae7f47.html.

[36] John Bresnahan and Jake Sherman, "Jim Justice is still commuting almost daily to D.C. from W.Va.," Punchbowl News, October 14, 2025, https://punchbowl.news/article/senate/justice-commute/.

[37] U.S. Senate, "S.2493 – Airline Deregulation Act of 1978" 95th Congress, https://www.congress.gov/bill/95th-congress/senate-bill/2493; National Air and Space Museum, "Airline Deregulation: When Everything Changed," December 17, 2021, https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/airline-deregulation-when-everything-changed/; Severin Borenstein, "Airline Mergers, Airport Dominance, and Market Power," University of California, Berkeley, May 1990, https://faculty.haas.berkeley.edu/borenste/download/AERPP90AirMerge.pdf.

[38] William J. McGee, "Testimony Before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Antitrust, Competition Policy, and Consumer Rights For a Hearing on "Examining Competition in America's Skies," American Economic Liberties Project, September 30, 2025, https://www.economicliberties.us/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/AELP-Testimony-McGee-9.29.25-FINAL.pdf.

are 21% lower on average in markets served by ultra-low-cost carriers such as Allegiant, Frontier, and Spirit.[39]

Yet the FAA currently allows takeoff and landing slot exemptions for private aircraft at the nation's most congested commercial airports, where nearly all such slots should be used by airlines. As noted earlier, airlines have limited access to a finite number of airports, while most private aircraft have access to 10 other airports for every one commercial facility used by scheduled airlines.

Private aircraft at congested commercial airports

Although congestion can be a problem at dozens of airports nationwide on any given day, the FAA closely monitors and regulates hourly takeoff and landing "slots" at seven of the busiest airports in the U.S. First introduced in 1968, slot controls are permanently in use at three domestic facilities: New York LaGuardia (LGA), New York Kennedy International (JFK), and Washington National (DCA). This means that these airports are effectively closed to new traffic.[40]

Slot controls are also temporarily in use at Newark Liberty International (EWR). In addition, the FAA continually monitors the need for controls at three other busy airports: Chicago O'Hare International (ORD), San Francisco International (SFO), and Los Angeles International (LAX). Since new and low-fare airlines are either shut out or on waiting lists to gain access to these facilities, it would make sense that private jets — which have dozens of other options — would be shut out as well.

Yet the FAA allows private jets access at all seven facilities, which are some of the busiest airports on the planet. The more slots they use, the fewer options ordinary consumers have — especially for smaller and low-fare carriers.[41]

Below is a breakdown of private jet access at the nation's seven most congested airports. Notably, all seven of these airports comprise part of what the FAA terms the "Core 30" airports nationwide. These are the busiest commercial facilities in the country, which the FAA closely tracks. In 2024, they combined for 12.7 million airport takeoffs and landings.[42]

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[39] DCA Reagan National, "Slot & Perimeter Rules," https://www.flyreagan.com/about-airport/aircraft-noise-information/dca-reagan-national-slot-perimeter-rules; Alexander R. Bachwich and Michael D. Wittman, "The Emergence and Effects of the Ultra-Low Cost Carrier (ULCC) Business Model in the U.S. Airline Industry," Massachusetts Institute of Technology, International Center for Air Transportation, https://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/104869/ulcc-paper-draft-revFINAL.pdf; William J. McGee, "Refuing the Myths Defending the JetBlue-Spirit Merger," ProMarket, March 2, 2024, https://www.promarket.org/2024/03/02/refuting-the-myths-defending-the-jetblue-spirit-merger/.

[40] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "Slot Administration," https://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/ato/service_units/systemops/perf_analysis/slot_administration.

[41] *Id.*

[42] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "Core 30," https://www.aspm.faa.gov/aspmhelp/index/Core_30.html; U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "Air Traffic By the Numbers," June 2025, https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/by_the_numbers/air-traffic-by-the-numbers-FY2024.pdf.

Permanent Level 3 Slot-Controlled Airports

- Washington National/DCA: During normal conditions, DCA is configured for 60 arrivals and departures per hour between 6 a.m. and midnight. Of those 60, 48 are designated for airlines and commuter/regional carriers, and 12 slots per hour are reserved for non-airline general aviation. This means a whopping 216 slots per day are allotted to private planes at what is arguably the busiest small commercial airport in the U.S. Therefore, because of DCA's proximity to downtown Washington, every carrier in the country — including low-fare airlines — is further restricted from offering more service, more routes, and more competition.
- New York LaGuardia/LGA: At LGA between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m., three slots per hour are reserved for "unscheduled operations," including general aviation, charters, military, and positioning flights. This was reduced from six slots per hour in years past.[43]
- New York Kennedy/JFK: JFK, which has eight approach and departure runways, as opposed to four each at LGA and DCA, allows 81 takeoffs and landings per hour between 6 a.m. and 11 p.m. Of these 81 slots, 80% are designated as Operating Authorizations for airlines awarded these slots.[44]

Temporary Level 3 Slot-Controlled Airports

- Newark Liberty/EWR: In June 2025, the FAA temporarily imposed slot controls at EWR, changing the airport's status from Level 2 to Level 3 through at least October 2026. This was in response to well-publicized air traffic control staffing shortages at Newark. Currently, the FAA allows unscheduled operations on a "first come, first served" basis.[45]

Level 2 Slot-Monitored Airports

- Chicago O'Hare/ORD: O'Hare is a hub for both United Airlines and American Airlines, and subsequently is the second busiest airport globally for aircraft movements. Despite this heavy airline traffic, ORD also accommodates 10,743 general aviation operations, which translates to more than 29 per day on average.[46]
- San Francisco/SFO: At SFO in 2024, general aviation produced 6,670 flight operations, while air taxis logged 21,664 movements, totaling 28,334. Combined, this averaged 77 such flights per day.[47]
- Los Angeles/LAX: Despite being the busiest airport in California (35.7 million passengers in the first half of 2025 alone) and despite being surrounded by numerous civil airports in the greater Los Angeles area, LAX also handled 12,877 general aviation flights and 20,747 air taxi

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[43] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "Operating Limitations at New York Laguardia Airport" 14 CFR part 93, May 25, 2016, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/05/25/2016-12220/operating-limitations-at-new-york-laguardia-airport; Business Jet Traveler, "LaGuardia Cuts General Aviation Slots," October 2008, https://www.bjtonline.com/business-jet-news/laguardia-cuts-general-aviation-slots.

[44] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "Operating Limitations at John F. Kennedy International," May 13, 2024, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/05/13/2024-10297/operating-limitations-at-john-f-kennedy-international-airport.

[45] *Id.*

[46] Road Genius, "O'Hare International Airport Statistics," August 7, 2025, https://roadgenius.com/statistics/airports/usa/ohare-ord-airport/.

[47] Road Genius, "San Francisco International Airport Statistics," September 21, 2025, https://roadgenius.com/statistics/airports/usa/san-francisco-sfo-airport/.

operations in 2024. Together this combined for 33,624 aircraft movements, with an average of 92 per day.[48]

Private aircraft at other commercial airports

Five of the remaining 23 Core airports are on the National Business Aviation Association's list of the Top 20 U.S. General Aviation Airports in 2025. These five are:[49]

- #6 Las Vegas Harry Reid International (LAS)
- #9 Washington Dulles International (IAD)
- #17 Chicago Midway International (MDW)
- #18 Salt Lake City International (SLC)
- #20 Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International (FLL)

At less crowded commercial airports, there is ample room for both airlines and private jets to operate side-by-side. But this examination of the nation's busiest and most congested facilities makes it clear that the FAA needs to revamp private jet access at such airports, especially those that are slot-controlled.

IV. Private Jet Fliers Insist on Using Congested Commercial Airports While Taxpayers Foot the Bill

Availability of U.S. airports

Private jet owners, operators, and the richest air travelers have far more access and choices for takeoffs and landings in the national airspace system than airline passengers, who must adhere to the carriers' schedules at far fewer airports.

Here's the breakdown of civilian (non-military) airports in the United States:[50]

- 14,551 private airports
- 5,082 public airports for use by general aviation, including private jets
- 506 primary airports used by commercial airlines

Yet many private jet users still insist on crowding the already congested commercial airports.

Who funds U.S. aviation?

As private jets clog overcrowded commercial airports that are designed for accommodating airlines carrying millions of travelers, it is important to note who funds U.S. aviation. (Hint: it is *not* private jets.) The reality is that there's a tremendous imbalance between the amounts paid by airline

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[48] Prachi Patel, "The Busiest Airports in California in 2025," Simple Flying, September 9, 2025, https://simpleflying.com/busiest-airports-california-2025; Los Angeles World Airports, "Ten Year Summary of FAA Aircraft Movements,"https://www.lawa.org/lawa-investor-relations/statistics-for-lax/10-year-summary/faa-aircraft-movements.

[49] National Business Aviation Association, "Business Aviation Airports: A Contrast to the Commercial Airline Hubs," 2025, https://nbaa.org/advocacy/legislative-and-regulatory-issues/business-aviation-essential-to-local-economies-and-national-interest/business-aviation-airports-a-contrast-to-the-commercial-airline-hubs/.

[50] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "Airport Categories," https://www.faa.gov/airports/planning_capacity/categories; U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "Air Traffic By The Numbers," https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/by_the_numbers; https://simpleflying.com/faa-air-traffic-by-the-numbers/; Eugenio Jaramillio, "Examining the past, present & future of the aviation construction business," Construction Business Owner, March 13, 2020, https://www.constructionbusinessowner.com/popular-now/current-state-american-airports.

passengers and by those flying in private jets, and the billionaires who can afford to travel this way are getting away with paying less than their fair share.

Every *ticketed* passenger on every domestic airline flight pays a mandatory 7.5% tax that supports the FAA's Airport and Airway Trust Fund (AATF). In addition, there is a domestic flight segment tax of $5.20 per passenger, per flight segment. Other sources of funding for the AATF include taxes on flights to and from Alaska and Hawaii; international departures and arrivals; as well as taxes for frequent flyer mileage, cargo, and mail. Such funding from the AATF constituted 87% of the FAA's budget in 2024 and was used for flight operations, grants for airports, facilities and equipment, and other critical safety programs and infrastructure, as well as maintaining the FAA's Essential Air Service program of subsidized airline service to small and rural communities.[51]

So what do the owners, operators, and travelers of private jets pay? A pittance compared to commercial passengers. There is a domestic general aviation gasoline tax of $0.193 per gallon, and for jets there is a general aviation jet fuel tax of $0.218 per gallon. Of course, mileage can vary — considerably. But in rough terms, commercial airliners burn between 750 and 3,000+ gallons of fuel per hour, with popular smaller aircraft such as the Boeing 737 and Airbus A320 burning 750-900 gallons per hour. Conversely, light private jets burn about 77-239 gallons per hour. Therefore, private jets are paying about a tenth in fuel taxes, even though private jets are burning considerably more fuel on a per-passenger basis.[52]

For context, these are the two smallest slivers among the six sources of AATF revenue: non-commercial gasoline and jet fuel taxes comprised about 2% of the fund's $18.3 billion total in 2024. By far the largest chunk of this revenue — $11.9 billion, some 65% — came from the taxes paid by airline passengers on every flight.[53]

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[51] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "Airport & Airway Trust Fund (AATF)," https://www.faa.gov/about/budget/aatf; U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "Airport and Airway Administration Trust Fund (AATF) Fact Sheet," https://www.faa.gov/about/budget/aatf/airport-and-airway-administration-trust-fund-aatf-fact-sheet.

[52] Anjali Saini, "How Much Fuel Does a Commercial Airplane Use?," Premier Petroleum, December 9, 2025, https://fuel.premierpetroleum.com/how-much-fuel-commercial-airplane-uses; VREF, "What Private Jet Has the Lowest Fuel Consumption Rate?," May 2, 2019, https://vref.com/news/what-private-jet-has-the-lowest-fuel-consumption-rate/.

[53] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "Airport & Airway Trust Fund (AATF)," https://www.faa.gov/about/budget/aatf; U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "Airport & Airway Trust Fund (AATF) Fact Sheet," https://www.faa.gov/about/budget/aatf/airport-and-airway-administration-trust-fund-aatf-fact-sheet. In "How to Fix Flying," AELP called for a revamping of AATF because only base fares are taxed, so for the last two decades FAA funding has been shortchanged by billions in "ancillary" junk fees for baggage, seat selection, priority boarding, etc. *See*, William J. McGee and Ganesh Sitaraman, "How to Fix Flying: A New Approach to Regulating the Airline Industry," American Economic Liberties Project and Vanderbilt Policy Accelerator, January, 2024, https://www.economicliberties.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/20240124-AELP-airlines-v5.pdf.

Costs of flying

To be clear, flying can be expensive for all travelers, as every type of aircraft incurs costs at airports for servicing, maintenance, fueling, parking, passenger handling, and myriad other functions. This applies from the smallest private single-engine Cessna 172s and Piper M700 Furys to the largest widebody Boeing 787s and Airbus A380s. There often are fixed base operator fees as well. (FBOs are the companies that provide such servicing to private planes.)[54]

Fees to fly in and out of a given airport can vary widely, with the richest air travelers in private jets paying less than the major airlines, which of course pass these costs on to passengers. As one airline journalist notes, "[i]n most cases, smaller jets are typically assessed fees based on the number of seats they accommodate, while larger and heavier jets are subject to costs calculated based on their weight."[55] There are also landing fees assessed based on aircraft weight. This happens at a number of busy commercial airports. At New York's LaGuardia Airport, there is a $100 fee most hours of the day, as well as landing fees of $17.72 per 1,000 pounds of takeoff weight. For the Embraer Phenom 300 — one of the most popular private jets — that comes to 18,000 pounds maximum takeoff weight, or $319. For comparison, the Boeing 737 MAX 8 has a maximum takeoff weight of 181,000 pounds, so the rate of $18.04 per 1,000 pounds totals $3,265.[56]

Although larger airliners incur higher operational costs than small private jets, when private jets gain access to public infrastructure at commercial airports, this incurs costs that airline travelers and taxpayers inevitably wind up paying, separately from the carriers' base fares and optional junk fees. As ultra-low-cost carrier Spirit notes on its website, these mandatory passenger taxes are "the government's cut."[57]

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[54] Pilot Institute, "The Ultimate Guide to Airport Fees," June 5, 2023, https://pilotinstitute.com/airport-fees/; Black Jet, "Breaking Down Privaet Jet Costs: How Much You'll Pay Per Hour to Fly Private," November 12, 2024, https://www.blackjet.com/post/breaking-down-private-jet-costs; Vyte Klisauskaite, "What Sorts of Landing Fees Do Private Jets Face?," Simple Flying, August 28, 2023, https://simpleflying.com/private-jets-landing-fees-guide/.

[55] William J. McGee and Ganesh Sitaraman, "How to Fix Flying: A New Approach to Regulating the Airline Industry," American Economic Liberties Project and Vanderbilt Policy Accelerator, January, 2024, https://simpleflying.com/private-jets-landing-fees-guide/.

[56] Aviation Department, The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, "Schedule of Charges for Air Terminals, LaGuardia Airport," July 1, 2024, https://pdflink.to/320d5be6/; Global Air, Phenom 300, https://www.globalair.com/aircraft-for-sale/specifications?specid=1120; DWU Consulting, "Large Hub Landing Fee Rate and Rates and Charges Books," https://dwuconsulting.com/airport-finance/large-hub/airline-rates.

[57] Spirit Airlines, "What is the Government's Cut?," https://customersupport.spirit.com/en-us/category/article/KA-01173.

V. Three Sets of Rules: Looser Standards for Private Planes

Government oversight and regulatory authority
Although private aircraft intermingle with airline flights in the nation's airspace and at commercial airports, there can be wildly different regulations in force, including those for safety and pilot training. The FAA's Federal Aviation Regulations (FARs) provide specific rules based on aircraft size and type of operations.

Federal Aviation Regulations (FAR #)	**Summary**	**Covered Operations**
Part 91: General Operating and Flight Rules[58]	The least restrictive rules	All aircraft in the United States must adhere to the minimum standards of Part 91
Part 135: Operating Requirements: Commuter and on Demand Operations[59]	Compared to 91, include additional safety requirements for aircraft and tougher rules for pilots, including alcohol and drug screening Passengers on charters flown by smaller aircraft can be exempt from TSA screening[60]	Aircraft not used for commercial operations — including private jets, helicopters, and air taxis
Part 121: Operating Requirements: Domestic, Flag, and Supplemental Operations[61]	The most restrictive rules	All U.S. scheduled (commercial) airlines and larger cargo carriers

There can be some confusion between the rules embedded in Parts 135 and 91, because some aircraft are covered by both rules depending on whether they carry paying passengers or not. But these rules are quite different, as Business Jet Traveler explains:

"*At first glance, it may seem odd that the FAA has two sets of rules for operating the same aircraft, depending on whether paying passengers are aboard. But the agency thinks the public has a right to expect that people in the business of providing transportation will be especially careful in doing so. Part 135 rules are designed to hold pilots, aircraft, operations, and even passengers to a higher standard than would pertain to someone providing his own transportation. (Part 91 still applies, unless trumped by a more restrictive Part 135 rule.)*"[62]

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[58] 14 CFR Part 91, https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-14/chapter-I/subchapter-F/part-91.

[59] 14 CFR Part 135, https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-14/chapter-I/subchapter-G/part-135?toc=1.

[60] Transportation Security Administration, "Aviation Programs," https://www.tsa.gov/for-industry/aviation-programs.

[61] 14 CFR Part 121, https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-14/chapter-I/subchapter-G/part-121?toc=1.

[62] Jeff Wieand, "The Whole Truth About Part 91 and Part 135," Business Jet Traveler, https://www.bjtonline.com/business-jet-news/the-whole-truth-about-part-91-and-part-135.

Airlines flying through commercial airspace operate alongside Part 91 private airplanes that have more lenient Part 91 piloting standards, with no flight duty time restrictions or mandatory rest periods between flights. Restrictions for flying during hazardous weather and at smaller airports are more liberal, and management personnel providing another level of safety on the ground are not mandatory. Passengers are not required to provide identification. In short, many of the small aircraft transiting busy commercial airports are operating by a much different — and much more lenient — set of rules.[63]

The presence of less-experienced private pilots at busy commercial airports raises safety concerns. For example, in February 2025, a dramatic viral video showed a Flexjet private jet (operating under FAR Part 91) failing to heed air traffic control instructions and taxiing directly onto an active runway just as a Southwest Airlines 737 was about to touch down. This forced Southwest to execute a go-around, narrowly avoiding a tragic collision by just 200 feet.[64]

There also are stark differences between the security standards in place for airlines and airline passengers compared to the policies that "guide" security for general aviation. In fact, the TSA's Security Guidelines for General Aviation Airport Operators and Users, updated in July 2025, offers suggestions rather than rules, stating, "This document does not contain regulatory language, nor is it intended to suggest that any recommendations or guidelines should be considered mandatory."[65]

Government shutdown

While tens of millions of American air travelers suffered during the 43-day government shutdown, the richest Americans prospered. In fact, *The New York Times* documented that private aviation did "banner business" during the shutdown.[66]

When air traffic control shortages worsened, commercial flight restrictions were imposed by the FAA at 40 busy airports nationwide, leading to thousands of airline flight cancellations daily. At first the FAA failed to restrict private aircraft, but by week six of the shutdown, members of Congress and others were loudly calling for the FAA to restrict private jet access as well.[67]

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[63] Pilot Institute, "Differences Between FAA Part 91, 121, and 135 in Aviation," February 26, 2025, https://pilotinstitute.com/part-91-vs-121-vs-135/; Latitutude 33 Aviation, "Part 91 and 135 Operations: What Makes Them Different?," https://l33jets.com/resources/blog/the-difference-between-part-91-and-part-135-operations/; Hillsboro Aero Academy, "Part 121 vs 135 vs 91: Differences & What You Should Know," December 10, 2024, https://blog.flyhaa.com/blog/part-121-vs-135-vs-91; https://www.bjtonline.com/business-jet-news/the-whole-truth-about-part-91-and-part-135.

[64] StreamTime Live, YouTube, "Official Footage of Chicago Midway Near Miss on February 25, 2025," February 25, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRuxZEVBeOY; National Transportation Safety Board, "Aviation Investigation Prelimiary Report," February 25, 2025, https://pdflink.to/c752b355/.

[65] Transportation Security Administration,"Security Guidelines for General Aviation Airport Operators and Users," July 30, 2025, https://www.tsa.gov/sites/default/files/ga-security-guidelines-july2025.pdf.

[66] Christine Chung, "Who Didn't Suffer During the Shutdown? People Flying Private," The New York Times, November 11, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/11/travel/shutdown-private-air-travel.html.

[67] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "DOT & FAA Announce Temporary 10% Reduction in Flights at 40 Airports," press release, November 6, 2025, https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/us-transportation-secretary-sean-p-duffy-faa-administrator-bryan-bedford-outline-series; Rhian Lubin, "Showdown hits rich Americans after FAA bans most private flights from landing at nation's busiest airports," Independent, November 10, 2025, https://www.the-independent.com/news/world/americas/us-politics/shutdown-flight-restrictions-private-jets-b2862173.html; Facebook, California Governor Candidate Katie Porter, https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1CxjoHz9gK/; X, Senator Jeff Merkley,

It's noteworthy that when the FAA finally did act, private jet restrictions went into effect at just 12 of those 40 facilities (with exceptions for law enforcement, medical, and firefighting aircraft). And some of the nation's busiest airports for private aviation — including Florida's Palm Beach International, New York's Westchester County, and California's Van Nuys — experienced no cuts at all. Still, the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) stated it was "pushing back" by asserting that closing airspace at those 12 airports would set a "horrible precedent."[68] In the case of Palm Beach, this omission was particularly worrisome because of its already notorious on-time record, with the DOT citing two tarmac delays of more than three hours in 2024.[69]

Frontier Airlines CEO Barry Biffle took to social media to suggest that the best way to address the congestion caused by a shortage of air traffic controllers during the shutdown would be for the FAA to implement temporary slot controls as it does during Super Bowls, airshows, and other major events, to more fairly spread cancellations among the airlines.[70]

By November 11 — day 42 of the shutdown — TravelHost was reporting, "While commercial flights are facing many cancellations and delays, private jets are using airport resources at normal rates." This despite the fact that a group called Patriotic Millionaires had offered a compelling solution to the shutdown's controller shortage crisis; founder Erica Payne suggested, "If you need a 10% reduction [in flights], you can get 100% of your reduction from the private planes. You do not need to affect commercial flights, period." It remains uncertain if the FAA ever seriously considered this alternative to the widespread airline flight disruptions that affected millions of travelers.[71]

November 7, 2025, https://x.com/SenJeffMerkley/status/1986896310885113940?s=20; X, Video of Abby Disney, November 7, 2025, https://x.com/1zzyzyx1/status/1986985527808303131?t=L_w6PzFGfLIg4LxajIpTpA&s=19; X, Video of NewsNation anchor Leland Vittert, November 8, 2025, https://x.com/MikeSington/status/1987209103069110758?t=D3gLlOThL4qwfCS-ke2Z9g&s=09.

[68] NATA, "Operational Update – New NOTAMs Issued for Multiple U.S. Airports," November 9, 2025, https://nata.aero/operational-update-new-notams-issued-for-multiple-u-s-airports/; Leslie Josephs, "FAA prohibits most private jets at 12 major airports amid shutdown's air traffic staffing problems," CNBC, November 10, 2025, https://www.cnbc.com/2025/11/10/government-shutdown-private-jets.html; Christine Chung, "Who Didn't Suffer During the Shutdown? People Flying Private," The New York Times, November 11, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/11/travel/shutdown-private-air-travel.html; Jay Wiles, "AOPA Pushes Back on GA Ban Renewed Privatization Push," November 13, 2025, https://www.aopa.org/news-and-media/all-news/2025/november/13/aopa-pushes-back-on-ga-ban-privatization-push.

[69] U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of Aviation Consumer Protection, "Air Travel Consumer Report," February 2025, https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2025-03/February%202025%20ATCR.pdf.

[70] LinkedIn, Barry Biffle, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/barry-biffle-8856591_thanks-to-all-of-you-who-have-sent-me-messages-activity-7383984183800586240-3daS.

[71] Marissa Bradstreet, "Private jets have been flying during shutdown; here's how it is impacting your flight," Travel Host, November 11, 2025, https://travelhost.com/airlines/private-jets-during-government-shutdown; Kristin Toussaint, "These millionaires have a suggestion for the FAA: Cancel all private jet flights during the shutdown," Fast Company, November 7, 2025, https://www.fastcompany.com/91437451/faa-should-cancel-all-private-jets-during-shutdown-say-millionaires.

VI. Costs of Airport Congestion to Consumers

Private jets exacerbate an already overworked air traffic control network, particularly in congested airspace and at congested airports. This has far-ranging negative effects that could be addressed if private aircraft were restricted from operating at the busiest facilities.

Lost time for passengers and corporations

Back in 2010, researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, commissioned by the FAA found airline delays cost Americans $32.9 billion annually. Not surprisingly, more than half this cost ($16.7 billion) was borne by passengers, and only a quarter ($8.3 billion) was borne by airlines. Lost demand was estimated at $3.9 billion, and the impact on GDP was $4 billion. Flight disruptions have soared since then.[72]

In August 2025, the travel productivity firm Perk surveyed 7,000 business travelers flying airlines worldwide and found 89% of corporate flyers were affected by travel disruptions that year, the highest percentage over the last three years. The survey also reported 66% of business travelers reported higher stress, which negatively impacted work-life balance and contributed to burnout risk and lower employee satisfaction.[73]

This places financial burdens on corporate America, which typically manifest via higher prices for goods and services. For example, the Global Business Travel Association found U.S. companies spent more than $17 billion last year due to flight disruptions. Globally, the passenger rights organization AirHelp found flight delays and cancellations cost travelers $67.5 billion.[74]

Added costs for airlines that drive up airfares

Although most flight disruptions are caused either by the airlines themselves and/or by "force majeure" factors such as weather, natural disasters, security, air traffic control, etc., such disruptions are exacerbated by private jets; the resulting costs are ultimately passed along to airline passengers via higher airfares. Frontier Airlines CEO Barry Biffle recently addressed this by asserting that private jets "game the system" by departing earlier than airlines when there are air traffic control delays. Biffle said, "Sadly, airlines often end up having to cancel because these delays stack up and time out our crews."[75]

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[72] Ann Brody Guy, "Flight delays cost $32.9 billion, passengers foot half the bill," UC Berkeley News, October 19, 2010, https://news.berkeley.edu/2010/10/18/flight_delays/; U.S. Representative John Garamendi, "New Study: Flight Delays Cost $32.9 Billion, and Passengers Foot Half the Bill," press release, October 18, 2010, https://garamendi.house.gov/press-release/new-study-flight-delays-cost-329-billion-and-passengers-foot-half-bill.

[73] Perk, "The Cost of Travel Disruption in 2025," September 30, 2025, https://www.perk.com/blog/business-travel-chaos-survey/.

[74] *Id.*; GBTA, "Global Business Travel Spending to Reach $1.57 Trillion in 2025 Amid Trade Policy Uncertainty and Economic Risk, According to New GBTA Forecast," July 21, 2025, https://gbta.org/global-business-travel-spending-to-reach-1-57-trillion-in-2025-amid-trade-policy-uncertainty-and-economic-risk-according-to-new-gbta-forecast/; Fabrice Diedrich, "The Cost of Delays," Cosmos, February 27, 2025, https://usecosmos.com/blog/the-cost-of-delay.

[75] Christy Rakoczy, "Frontier Airlines CEO shares secret reason flights get canceled," The Street, October 17, 2025, https://www.thestreet.com/travel/frontier-airlines-ceo-reveals-hidden-reason-flights-get-canceled.

Such airline costs include:

- Excess fuel burned;
- Wasted aircraft usage;
- Extended labor costs;
- Crew duty time limitations necessitating replacement crews; and
- Passenger compensation for delayed and canceled flights.

Airlines for America (A4A), representing the largest U.S. carriers, estimates delays cost airlines $100.76 *per minute* once the aircraft pushes back from the gate.[76]

The FAA estimates the average value of a passenger's time is $47.10 per hour. All told, A4A found in 2019 that the total annual cost of delays — including direct costs, indirect costs, and lost demand — was $33 billion. However, it's important to note that since 2020, airline flight delays and cancellations have soared considerably.[77]

Carbon footprint

A few years ago, *The Hollywood Reporter* chronicled the private rides in the sky for A-listers in entertainment, politics, and business, including Donald Trump, Michael Bloomberg, Oprah Winfrey, Tom Cruise, Mark Cuban, and Steven Spielberg. Ironically, some of them are outspoken in voicing concerns about global warming.[78]

What's more, some celebrities — most infamously Kylie Jenner and her 2022 hop within Southern California in her $72 million Bombardier BD700 that lasted 17 minutes — take private jets when other forms of transportation would be much easier on the planet. A PBS investigation compared emissions per passenger for four different modes on the popular New York-Washington, D.C., route, and the results showed that flying by private jet burned more than 45 times the CO2 of flying via airline.[79]

Private Jet	7,913 pounds of CO2
Commercial Airline	174 pounds of CO2
Bus	88 pounds of CO2
Amtrak	7 pounds of CO2

[76] Airlines for America, "U.S. Passenger Carrier Delay Costs," October 3, 2025, https://www.airlines.org/dataset/u-s-passenger-carrier-delay-costs/.

[77] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, https://www.faa.gov/sites/faa.gov/files/regulations_policies/policy_guidance/benefit_cost/econ-value-section-1-tx-time.pdf; Airlines for America, "U.S. Passenger Carrier Delay Costs," October 3, 2025, https://www.airlines.org/dataset/u-s-passenger-carrier-delay-costs/.

[78] The Hollywood Reporter, "Hollywood's Private Jets: From Oprah Winfrey to Tom Cruise, Who Owns What," https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/gallery/private-jets-oprah-tom-cruise-spielberg-trump-cuban-bloomberg-368304/.

[79] Oliver Milman, "A 17-minute flight? The super-rich who have 'absolute disregard for the planet'," July 21, 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jul/21/kylie-jenner-short-private-jet-flights-super-rich-climate-crisis; Institute for Policy Studies and Patriotic Millionaires, "High Flyers 2023: How Ultra-Rich Privaet Jet Travel Costs the Rest of Us and Burns Up Our Planet," May, 2023, https://ips-dc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/High-Flyers-2023-Report.pdf; Seth Borenstein, "Carbon pollution from high-flying rich in private jets soars," PBS News, November 7, 2024, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/carbon-pollution-from-high-flying-rich-in-private-jets-soars.

A 2024 study headed by Stefan Gossling, a transportation researcher at Linnaeus University in Sweden, found private jet emissions soared 46% between 2019 and 2023, with 26,000 aircraft operating 18.6 million flights over five years. Not surprisingly, most of that traffic occurs in the United States, where 68.7% of all private aircraft are registered, translating to 5.5 private jets for every 100,000 people.[80]

PBS analyzed the report and concluded, "About 51% of those private jets burn at least 239 gallons of fuel per hour. That translates to more carbon emissions in two hours and one minute than the IEA's estimate of the average person's yearly 4.7 tons of pollutants, the study calculated." An executive at the Center for Biological Diversity summed it up: "It's a grim joke that the billionaire class is flying private jets to the annual climate conferences, and the United Nations should crack down on this hypocritical practice."[81] This wasn't an idle assertion. As noted above, a small community of the super-rich populated the same large events, including the United Nations climate negotiations in Dubai.[82]

VII. Air Traffic Control Oversight of Private Jets

Indirect costs to taxpayers

We already noted how users of private jets pay only a tiny portion of the funds the FAA requires to ensure all aircraft operate safely and efficiently in U.S. airspace and at airports nationwide. But on the other side of the ledger, they also negatively impact taxpayers in other resources, like the time and effort required of FAA air traffic controllers and FAA safety inspectors to serve and oversee private jet operations.

Most private jets operate at private airports rather than busy commercial airports. In fact, the top facility in the U.S. for general aviation is New Jersey's Teterboro Airport, just outside New York City, which does not provide airline service.[83]

However, Teterboro — like many general aviation facilities — has adjacent "terminal control area" airspace that overlaps with major commercial airports, in this case both Newark Liberty and New York LaGuardia. In other words, airplanes arriving and departing Teterboro cross into space designated for both EWR and LGA. For controllers overseeing airline operations, private planes are a constant issue, even when they are not taking off or landing at a major airport. And when they do transit the busiest airports, controllers must give each private jet's "footprint" the same level of care and attention as the largest airliners. As one retired FAA inspector says, "It doesn't matter if it's an

[80] Stefan Gossling, Andreas Humpe, and Jorge Cardoso Leitao, "Private aviation is making a growing contribution to climate change," Communications Earth & Environment, Article 666, 2024, https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01775-z; Seth Borenstein, "Carbon pollution from high-flying rich in private jets soars," PBS News, November 7, 2024, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/carbon-pollution-from-high-flying-rich-in-private-jets-soars.

[81] Seth Borenstein, "Carbon pollution from high-flying rich in private jets soars," PBS News, November 7, 2024, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/carbon-pollution-from-high-flying-rich-in-private-jets-soars.

[82] Stefan Gossling, Andreas Humpe, and Jorge Cardoso Leitao, "Private aviation is making a growing contribution to climate change," Communications Earth & Environment, Article 666, 2024, https://www.nature.com/articles/s43247-024-01775-z; Seth Borenstein, "Carbon pollution from high-flying rich in private jets soars," PBS News, November 7, 2024, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/science/carbon-pollution-from-high-flying-rich-in-private-jets-soars.

[83] Texas A& Transportation Institute, "What is General Aviation," June 23, 2025, https://aviation.tti.tamu.edu/2025/06/23/what-is-general-aviation/.

Airbus with 300 people onboard or a bond trader flying his own Gulfstream — ATC has to watch over both of them."[84]

FAA controllers must ensure there is proper sequencing of all arriving and departing aircraft, regardless of their size. But aircraft size can also affect spacing because of "wake turbulence," a potentially deadly airflow disturbance produced by larger aircraft during takeoff and landing that particularly affects smaller private planes. As the FAA states, "In operations conducted behind heavy aircraft, or a small aircraft behind a B757 or other large aircraft, it is also an acknowledgment that the pilot accepts the responsibility for wake turbulence separation."[85]

All of this means private jets can adversely affect congestion at busy commercial airports. This can generate flight delays at airport terminals, taxiways, runways, and the airspace of surrounding airports, in addition to the national airspace system itself.

Congress spends taxpayer dollars to bail out private jets

Along with direct costs to taxpayers, Congress has also used taxpayer dollars to bail out private jets. When Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act in 2020, the general aviation industry — not just airlines — benefited from this taxpayer funding. The FAA distributed $100 million in grants to GA airports and suspended taxes on jet fuel. General aviation operators also had access to payroll support programs and small-business aid, such as the Paycheck Protection Program, with zero-free loans of up to $10 million.[86]

Loopholes

When weather or air traffic control shortages cause the FAA to institute a Ground Delay Program, those traveling in private jets can exploit regulatory loopholes to avoid long lines for takeoff. The authors conducted interviews in October 2025 with representatives of smaller airlines, who explained that when the FAA imposes such programs, airlines must adjust their publicly published scheduled departures so that, for example, a 1 p.m. departure is now 3 p.m. But in the same situation, a private jet flight without a published schedule can request a departure time two hours earlier than desired, knowing the delay program will ensure an on-time takeoff.[87]

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[84] Bill Carey, "Teterboro Airport Grows, Evolves In Busy Airspace," Aviation Week Intelligence Network, October 1, 2024, https://www.hackensack.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Teterboro-Airport-Grows-Evolves-In-Busy-Airspace-_-Aviation-Week-Network-copy.pdf.

[85] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, Aeronautical Information Manual, Chapter 4, Section 4, "ATC Clarances and Aircraft Separation," https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/atpubs/aim_html/chap4_section_4.html; AOPA, "Wake Turbulence Rips Aircraft Apart," https://www.aopa.org/training-and-safety/air-safety-institute/accident-analysis/featured-accidents/wake-turbulence-rips-aircraft-apart.

[86] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "2020 CARES At Grants," https://www.faa.gov/airports/cares_act; U.S. House of Representatives, "H.R.748. Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act," 116th Congress, https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/hr748/BILLS-116hr748enr.pdf; National Business Aviation Association, "Key Provisions for General Aviation Businesses in the CARES Act," May 11, 2020, https://nbaa.org/aircraft-operations/safety/coronavirus/key-provisions-for-general-aviation-businesses-in-the-cares-act/.

[87] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, Order JO 7110.126, Chapter 18, Section 10, "Ground Delay Programs," https://www.faa.gov/air_traffic/publications/atpubs/foa_html/chap18_section_10.html.

VIII. Lobbying

Lobbying

Members of Congress have been heavily lobbied by a number of organizations representing general aviation, private pilots, small aircraft, and private jet aircraft manufacturers, which all have a strong presence in Washington. This is not surprising, considering these organizations annually give millions of dollars to lobby both political parties. Consider these breakdowns of public lobbying filings as per OpenSecrets.org:

- The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) has spent over $3.6 million in two of the last three reporting years alone, with $60,000 going to Republican congressional and senatorial committees, and $60,069 going to Democratic congressional and senatorial committees just in 2024.[88]
- The National Business Aviation Association (NBAA) has spent nearly $5 million in the last three reporting years, and over the last 20 years, has disproportionately donated to Republicans over Democrats, some years by more than a 2:1 ratio.[89]
- The General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA) spent over $200,000 in 2024, and during 2023-2024, GAMA contributed 54.4% to Democrats and 47.3% to Republicans.[90]

IX. How to Make Skies Fairer: AELP's Recommendations

American Economic Liberties Project offers the following recommendations to ensure that air travel is safe and equitable: (1) the nation's busiest airports should prioritize the greatest good for the highest number of travelers and (2) the richest Americans should pay their fair share for their use of public assets when flying.

Congress – Including Directives for DOT & FAA

- *Obtain data.* Due to the shortage of public statistics on private jets operating into the nation's 506 commercial airports, Congress should require the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to obtain general aviation and private jet data from the FAA and release a public report on their findings. Additionally, Congress should direct the FAA to continually collect and publicly disseminate such statistics.
- *Revamp landing fees.* Congress should require the FAA to use its authority to revamp and increase airport landing fees at the nation's 506 commercial airports. Such fees should be paid by private jet operators to the FAA's Airport and Airway Trust fund to ensure private jets subsidize infrastructure equally with airline passengers. As we detailed above, a private jet's airport fuel tax will average about one-tenth of a small commercial airliner's, even though that same private jet will have an equal footprint with the largest planes when it comes to air traffic control, takeoff and landing spacing, runway and taxiway usage, etc. FAA should charge fuel tax rates comparable to larger commercial aircraft when private jets operate at

[88] OpenSecrets, "Aircraft Owners & Pilots Assn," 2024, https://www.opensecrets.org/orgs/aircraft-owners-pilots-assn/summary?id=D000000233.

[89] OpenSecrets, "National Business Aviation Assn," 2024, https://www.opensecrets.org/political-action-committees-pacs/the-peter-norbeck-leadership-pac/C00319723/summary/2024.

[90] OpenSecrets, "General Aviation Manufacturers Assn," 2024, https://www.opensecrets.org/political-action-committees-pacs/general-aviation-manufacturers-assn/C00014878/summary/2024.

commercial airports designated for airlines. Such rates should be designed to encourage private jet operators to use civil airports (with lower fuel taxes) not serving airlines.[91]

- *Kill tax breaks that incentivize private jet travel.* Congress should rescind the tax break for private jets in President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill. This 100% depreciation clause for the rich to rent or buy private jets runs contrary to the aims of an administration claiming to rid the government of waste.[92]
- *Fix the slots program.* Congress should direct the FAA to reform its slot control program to enhance competition and break the major airlines' stranglehold.[93] As noted above, for 58 years the FAA's slot control program has monitored and in some cases restricted takeoff and landing access at seven of the nation's busiest airports. There are two key ways to enhance and improve this program:
    - Expand these slot controls beyond just seven of the nation's 506 commercial airports used by scheduled airlines. Since the program was launched in 1968, airline traffic has increased severalfold nationwide, so at a minimum slot controls should be introduced at all of the FAA's Core 30 busiest airports, which the agency already closely tracks. This will ensure that competition is enhanced through expansion of smaller and low-fare airlines.[94]
    - With the exception of operations on behalf of government, first responders, and emergencies, the FAA should prevent private jets from operating into the most congested airports at any time of the day, or at a minimum during peak times of the day. Every takeoff and landing slot used by a private jet could instead be used to enhance airline competition and lower average fares.

Department of Transportation and Federal Aviation Administration

- *Ban private jets at congested airports.* FAA should use its authority under Federal Aviation Regulations 14 CFR § 93.123 on High Density Traffic Airports to greatly restrict and/or ban private aircraft at congested and busy commercial airports. This initiative should begin with private jets (exempting operations for government, first responders, emergencies, etc.) flying into and out of the FAA's Core 30 busiest airports nationwide. FAA should then examine such results before determining whether such restrictions and/or bans should be implemented at additional airports.[95]

In addition to these efforts to address the unfairness of private jet operators accessing major commercial airports, American Economic Liberties Project also supports other efforts to enhance competition and fairness for airline travelers. This includes mandatory sharing of airport gates and facilities, reforming airport leases, and designating DOT to oversee airport contracts.

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[91] Anjali Saini, "How Much Fuel Does a Commercial Airplane Use?," Premier Petroleum, December 9, 2025, https://fuel.premierpetroleum.com/how-much-fuel-commercial-airplane-uses; VREF, "What Private Jet Has the Lowest Fuel Consumption Rate?," May 2, 2019, https://vref.com/news/what-private-jet-has-the-lowest-fuel-consumption-rate/.

[92] U.S. House of Representatives, "H.R.1: An act to provide for reconciliation pursuant to title II of H. Con. Res. 14.," https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1/text.

[93] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "Slot Administration," https://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/ato/service_units/systemops/perf_analysis/slot_administration.

[94] U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, "Core 30," https://www.aspm.faa.gov/aspmhelp/index/Core_30.html.

[95] *Id.*;14 CFR § 93.123.

X. Conclusion

Despite the obstacles — COVID-19, government shutdowns, DOGE cost-cutting — the richest Americans have been aided by the Trump administration and Congress in gaining access to the nation's most congested airspace and airports, while simultaneously benefiting from tax breaks and disproportionately lower user taxes and fees. They take advantage of such privilege during peak times, such as the holidays and this week's Super Bowl. That privilege is bought and paid for by American taxpayers and airline passengers. To ensure that air travel is safe *and* equitable, policymakers must insist that the richest flyers pay their fair share. It's past time that federal regulators, along with lawmakers at the federal, state, and local levels, revamp the rules and regulations surrounding private jets in the interest of fairness, accessibility, and competition.