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Air Cargo American Shipper News

US denies China extra passenger flights

Eric Kulisch, Air Cargo Editor • Friday, June 19, 2020 1,020 2 minutes read



China Eastern operates one flight per week from Shanghai to New York. (Photo: Flickr/joolsgriff)



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The U.S. Department of Transportation late Friday denied a request by Chinese airlines to increase the number of flights allowed into the U.S. but

said it was simply a procedural matter, not a provocation.

Seven Chinese carriers filed proposed schedules for future service when the DOT said earlier this week it would only permit four weekly flights in total. Air China, China Eastern, China Southern and Xiamen Airways each already operate one scheduled passenger flight per week to Los Angeles or New York. Three other carriers currently not operating flights – Beijing Capital, Hainan Airlines and Sichuan Airlines – also sought permission for future flights.

“[A]ny proposed scheduled passenger services by Chinese carriers in excess of or different from those services permitted by [\[the June 15 order\]](#) would be adverse to the public interest,” the DOT said in its ruling.

In a news release, the DOT explained that “this order is effectively an administrative action designed to maintain the parity in scheduled passenger services between the U.S. and Chinese carriers announced by the Department earlier this week. That parity gives the carriers of each side the ability to operate four round-trip scheduled passenger operations each week.

“The Department has conveyed to our Chinese counterparts that this order is a procedural matter only and that it should not be viewed as an escalation on our part. The Department continues to indicate our willingness to revisit our action should the Chinese aviation authorities adjust their policies to bring about the necessary improved situation for U.S. carriers in which both they and the Chinese carriers could fully exercise their bilateral rights.”

The decision comes one day after President Donald Trump threatened to cut economic ties with China, coinciding with the release of a new book in which former National Security Advisor John Bolton accuses the president of kowtowing to Chinese President Xi Jinping in an effort to get political favors.

U.S. officials have played hardball with China over its reluctance to fully reopen its air transport market to U.S. carriers. China says it is taking

precautions to prevent foreign nationals from reintroducing the coronavirus and initially slow-walked requests by Delta Air Lines (NYSE: [DAL](#)) and United Airlines (NASDAQ: [UAL](#)) to resume service. The DOT then threatened to shut down Chinese flights before opting to allow the four existing services after Chinese authorities granted the U.S. carriers the right to operate two weekly flights each.

The DOT contends that any market restrictions violate a long-standing air services agreement between the countries.

Air China, China Southern and China Eastern are major players in the cargo space, with the former two also operating all-cargo aircraft.

Tensions between the U.S. and China have been fraying since early this year when Trump blamed China for exporting the coronavirus to the U.S. The two sides are also at odds over a new Chinese law that imposes security restrictions on Hong Kong, prompting the U.S. to consider revoking Hong Kong's special trade status.

On Thursday, Trump also signed human rights legislation calling for sanctions against those responsible for repression of the Uighur Muslim population at the same time Bolton accused him of privately encouraging Xi to proceed with detention camps for the minority group.

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