

Ten reasons not to give big commercial airlines more power by privatizing air traffic control

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In light of the aggressive push by the big commercial airlines and their proponents to privatize the nation's air traffic control system, here are ten reasons that privatization is a bad deal for consumers and communities.

1. The airlines just want more control.

At a meeting with President Donald Trump shortly after he was sworn in, the airlines admitted that their push to privatize is about gaining even more control over the country's air traffic. According to the CEO of Southwest, the current problem with the air traffic control system is "we're not in control." He went on to [say](#), "we want the government out of managing the air traffic control system."

2. The airlines have consolidated and as a result have become increasingly anticompetitive.

Privatization would move control of the air traffic control system from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to a new private, nonprofit corporation managed by stakeholders including the largest U.S. airlines. This would expand the power of the airlines, which, according to the Department of Transportation, already control nearly [70%](#) of the domestic market.

As recently [reported](#) by *Buzzfeed*, "11 big US domestic airlines have shrunk down to five extremely big ones, in a frenzy of takeovers and mergers. With less competition to worry about, airlines are now doing exactly what you'd expect them to do: spend less time worrying about how to keep their customers happy, and more time working out how to make more money...Less competition means [the airlines] don't have to worry as much about annoying people with delays or overbooked flights."

Why give the airlines power over a private corporation that would oversee fees, taxes, and infrastructure investments, and dictate who can fly where and when?

3. The airlines treat their customers poorly.

Congress has been forced to pass Passenger Bill of Rights legislation just to ensure airlines give their passengers water and restrooms during prolonged tarmac delays. In the most deplorable recent example of poor customer service, a passenger was reportedly dragged off an airline and physically assaulted when he refused to give up his seat to an airline employee. He suffered a severe concussion and broken nose, and lost two front teeth.

Last year, [40,000](#) paying, ticket-holding passengers were involuntarily bumped from flights because of overbooking by airlines, according to the Department of Transportation.

4. The airlines pocket their profits instead of investing in technology.

According to *Quartz*, the airlines average one major technical glitch a month and refuse to invest in their dilapidated and antiquated technology infrastructure. An industry analyst even said one major airline is running on a reservation system that is 35 years old.

According to a former Department of Homeland Security official, “The same airlines that can’t make their reservations systems work are pushing to manage an air traffic control system with 800 million flights a year, spanning thousands of airports...This begs the broader question of whether major decisions regarding the safety and security of the flying American public should rest in the hands of a private corporation—especially a corporation that would be controlled by the airlines, which have a track record of under-investing in their IT systems.”

5. The airlines don’t care about small towns and rural communities.

The airlines continue to demonstrate that they don’t care about smaller communities, taking every opportunity to cut off routes and access. For example, between 2007 and 2013, scheduled departures at medium-hub airports decreased nearly 24 percent and about 20 percent at small-hub airports, accounting to a report by the Government Accountability Office.

6. The airlines are only interested in investing in their major hubs.

Conversely, the airlines have been forthright about directing modernization investments into their hubs to benefit their business. For example, JetBlue’s CEO has openly declared that they intend to use the power they gain from privatization to invest where it is most profitable for the airlines: “We also need to direct infrastructure improvements into the regions of the country where they’ll produce the most benefits, like the Northeast Corridor.”

7. The airlines are the biggest cause of delays.

The airlines are responsible for the majority of all airline delays, as reported by the Department of Transportation. Why would giving them more control by privatizing air traffic control alleviate delays?

According to a statement from Senators Ed Markey (D-MA) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), “Data from the Department of Transportation and reported by Bloomberg reveals airline problems, including technical glitches and mechanical failures, as the leading cause of airline delays, surpassing weather and air-traffic control problems.”

8. The only ones who support privatization are those who stand to gain from it.

The privatization proposal is a corporate takeover, giving away perks, board seats, and power to already powerful interests, while decreasing congressional oversight that ensures decisions benefit the public. That is why local elected officials, consumer organizations such as the National Consumers League, rural and agricultural groups such as the National Grange and USA Rice Federation, and free market groups such as Center For Individual Freedom all oppose this proposal.

9. The airlines are slow to spend money to equip for NextGen.

The airlines have been painfully slow to embrace NextGen, the FAA's ongoing modernization effort. For years, the airlines questioned NextGen's business case and, as of September 2015, only 5.8% to 7% of all commercial aircraft were appropriately equipped for the transition. The airlines even pushed to have some of their fleet exempted from equipage mandates for five years more than any other segment of aviation. Moreover, the airlines refuse to pay for the transfer of any FAA facilities or assets to the private corporation they are proposing be in charge of air traffic control. The same airlines that through the years have received billions in bailout and bankruptcy protections now want the taxpayers to give them over \$20 billion in air traffic control facilities and equipment for free.

10. Other privatized systems have had problems.

The Canadian and U.K. privatized systems are much smaller than the U.S. system and have had a number of issues. For example, the Canadian system, which is less than a tenth of the size of the U.S. system, has had to adjust fees multiple times as a result of airline bankruptcies and economic cycles, and the U.K. system once required a major government bailout.

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