

Shoe-Removal Era Nears End at Airports as TSA Quietly Prepares Shift in Screening Policy

Millions of travelers may soon be spared the hassle of removing shoes at TSA checkpoints, as new procedures emerge from DHS reviews aimed at reducing screening delays, improving comfort, and responding to traveler frustrations voiced online.

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A major shift in U.S. airport security screening is quietly in motion: passengers may soon be able to keep their shoes on when passing through standard checkpoints. After nearly two decades of enforcing the widely disliked shoe-removal rule, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is reportedly preparing to end the practice, according to individuals familiar with the matter.

The policy change, first reported by travel industry newsletter Gate Access, has not yet been formally announced. According to the Wall Street Journal, TSA, while not confirming specifics, stated, “TSA and DHS are always exploring new and innovative ways to enhance the passenger experience and our strong security posture. Any potential updates to our security process will be issued through official channels.” TSA operates under the Department of Homeland Security.

The origins of the shoe-removal requirement date back to late 2001, during a period of heightened security concerns following the September 11 terrorist attacks. The catalyst was Richard Reid, widely known as the “shoe bomber,” who attempted to ignite explosives hidden in his footwear during a flight from Paris to Miami. The incident raised alarm about vulnerabilities in aviation security and triggered intense scrutiny of passenger footwear.

Initially, shoe-screening policies varied. However, in 2006, TSA made shoe removal a mandatory part of screening, citing intelligence that pointed to “a continuing threat.”

Over time, the rule became a source of frustration for travelers. Critics say it contributes to longer lines and unnecessary stress at checkpoints. Many passengers have expressed annoyance at having to walk barefoot or in worn socks through airport security lanes.

The rule’s unpopularity has even been credited with driving enrollment in TSA PreCheck, the trusted-traveler program that allows members to bypass shoe removal and other standard procedures. Other exceptions to the rule have existed for children aged 12 and under, as well as travelers 75 and older, who have been permitted to keep their shoes on.

The debate over the inconvenience of airport screening practices resurfaced earlier this year when Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy took to social media to engage with the public. In April, he posted on X (formerly Twitter), asking travelers how to improve the family travel experience. The next day, he followed up: “It’s very clear that TSA is the #1 travel complaint.”

Although no official start date has been provided for the rollback of the shoe-removal rule, developments indicate that travelers could soon enjoy a simplified screening process. For now, TSA maintains that any procedural updates will be shared through proper channels.