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FAA Ends Emergency Flight Reductions as Shutdown-Strained Air Traffic System Recovers Nationwide

The FAA will lift its order Monday morning after controller staffing rebounded following the 43-day shutdown, restoring full schedules at major hubs including. Officials say improved attendance and safety margins support a return to normal operations

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American Airlines jets at the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on Feb. 12, 2024. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

The Federal Aviation Administration announced Sunday that it will lift its emergency order reducing flights nationwide, allowing normal operations to resume across the U.S. airspace starting Monday at 6 a.m. Eastern Time.

The decision follows several days of improved staffing levels among air traffic controllers, who had been [strained by the recent 43-day government shutdown](#). U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy and FAA Administrator Bryan Bedford jointly stated that the positive trends in controller attendance and performance have restored safety margins, enabling a return to pre-shutdown schedules at major airports.

The phased reductions, which began November 7 and peaked at 10 percent cuts by November 14, were implemented to mitigate risks from controller shortages and fatigue during the shutdown, the longest in U.S. history. Affected hubs included Miami International (MIA), Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International (FLL), and dozens of others like Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson (ATL) and New York's John F. Kennedy (JFK). Airlines had warned of cascading delays and cancellations, impacting millions of passengers amid holiday travel preparations.

Recent metrics showed a rapid decline in staffing shortages since a high on November 8, with the FAA freezing reductions at 6 percent last week and further easing to 3 percent by Friday. Officials credited the government's reopening on November 12, which allowed back pay and recalls for furloughed workers, for the rebound. "Our safety team has monitored the data closely, and we're confident in terminating the order," Bedford said in the announcement.

Carriers such as American Airlines and Delta have begun notifying customers of restored flights, advising travelers to check statuses but expressing optimism for smoother operations. The move is expected to alleviate bottlenecks at busy corridors, though some residual delays may linger as systems normalize. Industry groups welcomed the news, noting it averts further economic losses estimated in the billions from disrupted commerce and tourism.

With immediate pressures easing, the FAA plans to shift resources toward long-term goals, including accelerated hiring of controllers and modernization of the air traffic control infrastructure. Duffy emphasized in the statement that "now we can refocus our efforts on hiring and building the state-of-the-art air traffic control system the American people deserve," aligning with broader administration priorities for aviation safety and efficiency.

No specific timeline for these upgrades was provided, but officials indicated ongoing collaboration with Congress and stakeholders to address chronic understaffing issues that predated the shutdown.