



▶ **ARE YOU SITTING ON** the tarmac and going nowhere? It may not be the looming clouds that are undermining your forward motion. It may be the missing pilot.

America is facing a severe pilot shortage, with the industry expected to be down 30,000 pilots by 2032, according to industry consulting firm Oliver Wyman.

In the U.S., there is a shortage of 17,000 pilots. This is happening despite an increase in demand for this profession by 10 percent over the last decade. According to a report by CBS News, the demand for airline seats in the U.S. increased by 25

Where's My Pilot?

Flight delays are often due to more than just bad weather—and staff shortages are a key reason

percent during the summer of 2022. However, from June 24 to 27, just before the Fourth of July, there were 31,850 flight delays and 6,346 cancellations, resulting in a 374-percent rise in delays.

Pundits blamed the pandemic when worldwide slowdowns and groundings forced the layoffs of significant numbers of airline staff, including pilots. Coupled with rising fuel costs, increasing demand and staffing shortages, passengers have been taking the hit with flight delays, travel chaos and inability to plan.

Many of these problems are related to planning, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation. “If airlines are running a schedule that they can’t service because they don’t have the staff to do it, we’re going to hold them accountable for that,” Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said—and claimed to be investigating airlines over these matters.

But pilot shortages existed pre-pandemic due to a lack of flight schools. After 9/11, the demand for these schools de-

creased, leading to a decline in training and hiring. Currently, the U.S. has around 1,600 private flight schools, down from 2,400 pre-9/11. U.S. airlines are fighting the shortage by opening flight schools and offering scholarships. United purchased land to expand its training center, planning to hire 28,000 pilots by decade’s end. Alaska and Delta also opened flight schools.

Congress passed a bill to address the shortage, and the Regional Airline Association is pushing to hire foreign pilots and increase pilot retirement age. The Senate Commerce Committee is reviewing the bill for safety. “This is no time to weaken safety standards,” Air Line Pilots Association president Jason Ambrosi said.

“These retirement ages are there for a reason, and the reason is safety,” Buttigieg said in a televised interview. “I’m not going to be onboard with anything that could compromise safety. Now, what’s clearly the case is we need to cultivate, train and support a new generation of qualified pilots.”

FAST FOOD Travelers on the go can now order meals and beverages for gate-side delivery

● Hungry travelers passing through major airports can now order food and drinks for gate-side delivery from their devices. Airport concessions operator OTG is replacing the 21,000 iPads installed for ordering with QR codes at the 23 airport terminals where it operates. Travelers can order from their phones and pay with credit cards or Apple Pay. The orders will then be delivered to their gates so they can enjoy a bite without worrying about

missing the boarding call for their flight. Travelers can use QR codes posted throughout the airport to access menus for venues and place orders without leaving their seats.

OTG developed the Flo ordering service in-house at a cost of millions of dollars, CEO Rick Blatstein said. The concessionaire chose to use a website instead of an app, as few customers travel enough to warrant a dedicated app.

The Flo service also supports preordering. Travelers can schedule a pickup at a time of their choosing up to 24 hours in advance, including while they’re still in the air. Blatstein said preordering is optimal for travelers rushing to make a connection.

OTG operates 350 restaurants and bars at 23 airport terminals, including New York-JFK, Newark, LaGuardia, Chicago O’Hare and Philadelphia.

—LAUREN SMITH



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