

United slams Delta's request for flexibility on Haneda slots

- A Monitor Desk Report

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A public fight has broken out between United and Delta over service to Tokyo's Haneda Airport.

At issue is the limited number of daily landing rights that the DOT has allotted carriers at the airport. Delta has requested that the rules be changed to make scheduling to Haneda more flexible.

United, which would like to obtain new DOT authority to serve Haneda from Houston and Guam, is pushing back, saying the DOT's route awards in 2019 were based on the public interest. Any changes to those routes, says United, should only be made via a competitive, public process.

The dispute was seeded on April 30, when Delta requested that the DOT allow U.S. airlines to use up to two Haneda slots to serve any U.S.

gateway. Delta suggested such flexibility be initiated under a three-year pilot program.

American followed the next day with its own brief public filing supporting the proposal.

In its petition, Delta argued that the pandemic has changed the demand for service to Japan and that route flexibility will enable airlines "to adjust more nimbly to evolving marketplace dynamics."

Delta, United, American and Hawaiian are the four carriers that hold Haneda slots. Delta is authorized to serve Haneda daily from Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Seattle, Detroit, Atlanta, Honolulu and Portland, Ore. Hawaiian holds allocations for 21 weekly flights to Haneda from Honolulu and Kona.

American holds twice-daily allocations to fly to Haneda from Los Angeles and is authorized for a daily flight from Dallas/Fort Worth.

United holds daily Haneda allocations from Newark, Chicago O'Hare, Washington Dulles, Los Angeles and San Francisco. Twelve of those allocations were awarded as part of a competitive process in 2019, at which time United's applications for Haneda service from Houston and Guam lost out.

Under waivers put in place due to the pandemic, the four carriers don't currently have to utilize their Haneda slots, but that's slated to change by Nov. 1, United vice president of regulatory and policy Steve Morrissey said during a Monday afternoon press conference.

For July, United and American are scheduled to utilize all of their Haneda allocations, Cirium flight schedule data shows. Delta, however, isn't scheduled to utilize its landing rights from Portland or Honolulu.

In its DOT filing, Delta made no mention of which routes it doesn't want to fly and from where it would like to serve Haneda instead. But the carrier did cite weak Japan demand, in particular from Portland and Honolulu.

In a regulatory filing Monday, and in comments to the press, United argued that Delta's high fares on the Portland-Haneda route betray ulterior motives. A Monday afternoon flight search for Portland-Haneda for departure on Nov. 1 and return on Nov. 8 found that Delta's lowest

price was \$6,252. However, one-stop return tickets going through Seattle or Los Angeles were available starting at \$1,629.

United was also selling tickets starting at \$1,629 on its one-stop tickets on those dates between Portland and Haneda.

"They do not want to sell the tickets. Instead they want to move the flights to somewhere else," Morrissey said.

Delta on Monday(May 8) did not comment directly on United's allegations.

"Delta stands by our well-reasoned petition to the department," the carrier said.

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