

# Impact of the U.S. Government Shutdown on Transportation and Tourism

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## 1. Introduction

A partial shutdown of U.S. government agencies began on October 1, 2025. While the most recent previous shutdown lasted 35 days, spanning December 2018 to January 2019, the duration of the current shutdown remains unclear.

This analysis examines the potential effects of the government shutdown on the transportation and tourism sectors, utilizing the operational plans released by federal agencies on October 1st in conjunction with various media coverage. Readers should note that future developments may introduce new issues and responses.

## 2. Impact on the Aviation Sector <sup>1), 2)</sup>

As the agencies responsible for aviation safety, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) require many employees to continue working. Therefore, essential personnel, including air traffic controllers and airport security screeners, are expected to maintain their duties during a government shutdown.

At the FAA, 33,507 of 44,829 employees, including all 13,294 air traffic controllers, are designated to work. Similarly, the TSA is retaining 61,197 of its 64,130 employees.

While employee salaries are temporarily suspended and will be paid retroactively once an appropriations bill is passed, this delay raises concerns about staffing and morale. This was evident during the last shutdown, when reports showed that roughly 10% of TSA staff took sick leave,

directly leading to significantly extended security screening wait times at major airports.<sup>3)</sup>

The U.S. is currently intensifying air traffic controller recruitment to address existing shortages. Efforts are also underway to overhaul the air traffic control system following the aircraft collision near the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. Crucially, unlike past shutdowns, recruitment and training for air traffic controllers will continue during this period. Furthermore, the \$12.5 billion program to construct a new air traffic control system is expected to proceed, as mandated by the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act."<sup>4)</sup>

## 3. Impact on Non-Aviation Transportation Sectors <sup>1)</sup>

Turning to non-aviation transportation, several key U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) agencies—the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA)—are funded year-round through the Highway Trust Fund. Because this funding is separate from the regular appropriations budget, these agencies are expected to continue operations unaffected by the shutdown. This mechanism ensures that daily reimbursements to states and cities, amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars, will continue without interruption.

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is retaining 784 of its 1,023 staff members to continue working. While essential functions like railroad accident investigations and

field inspections will continue, non-critical activities such as contract and travel approvals will be suspended. Separately, Amtrak, the federally funded intercity passenger rail service, is not expected to be affected so long as it maintains sufficient operational funds for expenses like salaries and fuel.

The Federal Maritime Administration (MARAD), which oversees maritime policy, will retain 598 of its 790 staff members. This staffing ensures the continuation of operations critical to national security and human life, including the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA), maintenance of the National Defense Reserve Fleet (RRF), Merchant Ship Programs (MSP), and port infrastructure assistance and vessel disposal programs.

#### 4. Impact on Maritime Security <sup>2),5)</sup>

The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) is retaining 49,622 of its 52,377 personnel to ensure the continuation of legally authorized operations critical to human life, property, and national security. This includes essential duties like emergency response, such as hurricane preparedness, and securing U.S. borders.

#### 5. Impact on the Tourism Sector

In the tourism sector, in addition to the aforementioned developments in aviation and transportation, the operation of national parks will be affected.

According to the latest National Park Service (NPS) emergency response plan, 5,204 of 14,500 permanent staff will continue working.<sup>6)</sup> During the shutdown, park roads, viewpoints, trails, and outdoor monuments will remain accessible to the public. However, buildings requiring staff presence, such as visitor centers and other normally locked facilities, will be closed. While restroom access and trash collection will be maintained as minimum health and safety measures, emergency services will be significantly limited due to staffing cuts. Given that roughly 64% of staff are placed on furlough, only the most essential activities, specifically law enforcement, emergency response, and

firefighting, are expected to continue.

Additionally, museums, research centers, and the National Zoo are heavily reliant on federal appropriations, which account for approximately 62% of their budgets. However, they have announced they will remain open until at least October 6, utilizing "prior year funds" to cover operations.<sup>7),8)</sup>

#### 6. Reactions from Related Industries

Industry groups were already voicing harsh reactions, even before the partial government shutdown officially began.

In its message to elected leaders, Airlines for America (A4A) stressed the need for sincere, urgent solutions, noting the shutdown arrives at a critical juncture for both FAA air traffic control system modernization and TSA traveler processing enhancements.<sup>9)</sup>

Additionally, Jeff Freeman, President and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association, stated the government shutdown was "wholly preventable" and warned that it "would cost \$1 billion every week," severely impacting millions of travelers, businesses, and already burdened federal employees.<sup>10)</sup> Furthermore, surveys show that roughly 90% of the public believe that a shutdown should be avoided. A prolonged shutdown could lead to serious consequences, including long TSA checkpoint lines, flight delays/cancellations, deterioration of national parks, and further delays in modernizing critical travel infrastructure.

#### 7. Conclusion

In summary, the partial government shutdown will have widespread impacts on both the transportation system (primarily aviation) and the tourism sector (including national parks). Concerns remain that a prolonged shutdown will severely impact the American economy and citizens' lives, underscoring the strong desirability of an immediate resolution.

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