

Aviation officials, employees bracing for sequester



The looming budget cuts known as the sequester could have a huge impact on air travel, several officials and aviation workers warned Wednesday.

This isn't breaking news, of course. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood appeared at the White House last week to warn about how the sequester could lead to major delays and other assorted havoc.

But with the budget cuts set to begin (sometime) Friday, Post reporters staked out several events occurring in D.C. on Wednesday to get the latest. (These posts all ran over at Post Politics, your home for all things sequester, but we're rounding them up in one transportation-centric place.)

FAA head warns about flight delays

The head of the Federal Aviation Administration warned that the sequester could lead to major flight delays and the closure of hundreds of air traffic control towers at smaller airports across the country.

Michael P. Huerta, FAA administrator, spoke to an American Bar Association forum in downtown Washington about the sequester's impact. He echoed LaHood in predicting delays of up to 90 minutes to major cities like New York, Chicago and San Francisco, noting that these delays "could ripple across the country." Huerta also said that air traffic control towers in airports that are less busy could be closed, which could be a major problem for less-populated regions

(we'll touch on that again). Read more.

Air traffic controllers say sequester could have "long-lasting consequences"

If the spending cuts known as the sequester proceed unimpeded, they could create major problems for air travel with "long-lasting consequences," the union representing air traffic controllers said in a report on Wednesday.

The National Air Traffic Controllers Association said that higher costs, lags in air traffic updates and greater delays would be felt by travelers, pilots, airlines, businesses and the military. Travelers would begin to notice the impact in mid-April, according to the union. Plus, the Regional Airline Association said recently that small communities relying on regional airlines would bear a considerable brunt of the sequester. Read more.

TSA head: Sequester will snarl spring, summer travel
TSA administrator John S. Pistole said Wednesday that his agency is working closely with the FAA to coordinate efforts in the event budget cuts tied to sequestration lead to flight delays and long security lines.

Pistole, testifying before a House subcommittee on homeland security, said the biggest impact of the cuts could be felt during the busy spring break and summer travel seasons. The cuts would eliminate overtime, limiting the agency's ability to keep staffing levels up as passenger traffic builds. Read more.

Air traffic controllers bracing for furloughs
Paul Rinaldi, president of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, said the sequestration cuts would be devastating to the country's aviation industry.

Rinaldi, speaking at a luncheon, stressed what his union had said in the report issued earlier in the day. Furloughs and tower closures could "have extremely negative effects" on the nation's air traffic control system. In addition, workers could stand to lose as much as 20 percent of their pay due to the furloughs.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/dr-gridlock/wp/2013/02/27/aviation-officials-employees-bracing-for-sequester/>