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Daley fears flight caps at O'Hare

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BY [SHAMUS TOOMEY](#) AND [STEPHANIE ZIMMERMANN](#) Staff Reporters

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Mayor **Daley** fired off a preemptive strike Friday against the possibility of flight caps being reinstated at O'Hare Airport, and revealed he personally lobbied President Bush on the issue.

Daley said he heard "through the grapevine" that the federal government was pondering a temporary reinstatement of the flight restrictions only recently lifted at the airport. The city fought for years to get them removed.

"Placing caps at O'Hare is very anti-competitive," **Daley** said. "You can't get discount airlines in here. If I don't have that, then we're going to be less competitive."

Federal Aviation Administration officials insisted no decision has been made, but one could come soon. They continued to say O'Hare's chronic flight delays are "unacceptable" and that solutions must be found to alleviate them.

For the first five months of 2004, O'Hare was the nation's most delayed major airport in arrivals and departures. Only 63 percent of arrivals and 68 percent of departures were on time.

Overall delays were even worse in May despite United and American airlines voluntarily cutting peak-hour flights by 7.5 percent at the urging of Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta. **FAA** officials acknowledged storms played a big role in May.

"Clearly the performance is not good," **FAA** spokesman Greg Martin said. "O'Hare performance needs to be higher whether it's in good conditions or less than ideal conditions, and we're trying to figure out how to achieve that."

Congress first imposed hourly limits on flights at several major airports, including O'Hare, in 1968. O'Hare's were finally phased out by 2002. **Daley** opposes a temporary measure because it could be done without congressional input. He urged that the city be at the table before a decision is made.

"It's a temporary measure, but it could be on for 30, 40, 50 years," said **Daley**, who had the ear of Bush during the president's visit Thursday. "I was just bringing it to his attention and others'. I just wanted to make sure that the subject matter, that he understood it."



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City Aviation Commissioner John Roberson said caps would not only limit city revenue from landing fees and concessions, but also limit option for travelers.

"Putting caps in place kills market demand, and it really creates an environment where it limits competition," he said.

Daley said the long-term solution is his city's multibillion-dollar O'Hare expansion, which is still awaiting final **FAA** approval.

"They have to move on this," **Daley** said. "[Runways] shouldn't take 10 years. . . . In **Iraq**, we can build one in a day, a week, a month."

Also Friday, O'Hare expansion opponents argued that a pending city ordinance to allow the expansion's director to execute a wide range of contracts takes too much power away from aldermen who normally must approve the contracts.

But the director, Rosemarie Andolino, said her proposed new powers are needed to speed deals with local governments and wouldn't affect large, construction-related contracts.

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