

PDK Weight Limit Policy

There is a contractual agreement limiting the weight of aircraft that may use DeKalb-Peachtree Airport (PDK) to 66,000 pounds. The 11th Circuit Court based its ruling in 1988 on assurances that the runway extension was for safety not to accommodate planes over the 66,000-pound weight limit. Here are key dates and references to the weight/size limit policy.

1987--from DeKalb County's Environmental Assessment for runway extension:
"The largest aircraft capable of operating on Runway 2R-20L is the Gulfstream II/III corporate jet. The runway's weight bearing capacity is sufficient for the operation of this aircraft at gross weight (65,000 lbs.)."

1987--from FAA's review of Environmental Assessment for runway extension:
"The runway extension is neither designed nor intended to accommodate operations by aircraft larger than the ones presently using the airport. The extension would enhance the safety and efficiency of operations by these aircraft. The runway would not be strengthened and aircraft would not be allowed to depart with a gross takeoff weight above the current limitation of 66,000 pounds."

1988--from 11th Circuit Court of Appeals decision on Runway Extension:
"Furthermore, the proposal expressly maintains the current weight limitation of 66,000 pounds. The proposed runway extension is not designed to accommodate operations by aircraft larger than the ones currently using PDK."

1991--from PDK Master Plan inventory:
"[Runway 2R-20L] and parallel taxiway is constructed of concrete with pavement strengths of 45,000 pounds gross single gear load, 66,000 pounds gross dual gear load, . . . "

1991--in letter from DeKalb County CEO Manuel Maloof to Noise Abatement Advisory Committee Chair:

". . . there shall be no lengthening, increase of weight-bearing capacity, or widening of any PDK runway for any reason without an EIS [Environmental Impact Study/Statement] from this time forth. This is, as you know, our policy. There is no intent to change the present capacity or size of the airport."

In May 1991 the Board of Commissioners (BOC) approved the policy mentioned in this letter.

1992--from information packet given to PDK Airport Advisory Board members:
"Aircraft weighing over 66,000 lbs. prohibited."

1993--from *Becoming a Better Neighbor*, a DeKalb-Peachtree Airport Brochure:
"The 'mix' of aircraft that use PDK is limited to the capacity of its runways. The

largest runway at PDK has a 66,000 pound weight bearing capacity.”

1997--in letter from FAA’s William Albee:

“ . . . the stated purpose of the extension was a safety overrun area in case an aircraft had to abort its takeoff run. It is my understanding that the runway thresholds were not changed, and thus no larger or noisier aircraft were enabled to operate from the airport.”

1997--from FAR Part 150 Noise Compatibility Study Update:

“Aircraft weighing more than 66,000 pounds are prohibited from normal operation at PDK.”

1999--from Pilot Information on the PDK website:

“Rwy 02R-20L Weight Bearing Capacity: Single-46,000 lbs., Dual-66,000 lbs.”

THEN . . .

In a January 27, 1999, letter to the FAA, Airport Director Lee Rimmel cited the 66,000-pound limit as incorrect. He requested that the FAA change two publications to show 105,000 pounds rather than 66,000. It was learned that Mr. Rimmel routinely allowed aircraft certified to carry weight above the stated limit to operate out of PDK.

Airport Director Rimmel announced to the Airport Advisory Board at their meeting on March 10, 1999 that the county staff had recently found a reference to weight in the county code. Section 6-93, titled Dirigibles, blimps, gliders, etc., states, "Prior authorization is required before airships, dirigibles, blimps, gliders, free balloons, motorless aircraft or aircraft with a total gross weight in excess of seventy-five thousand (75,000) pounds land or take off at the airport. (Code 1976, § 6-4077)."

In a memo dated April 7, 1999, CEO Liane Levetan, attempted to clarify "the CEO's administrative weight limitation", but succeeded in confounding the issue further. She also said she "can find no rational basis to deny prior authorization for corporate and private aircraft which have been designed to comply with the federal aviation noise levels of stage II or greater, and which may exceed 66,000 pounds." PDK Watch came up with several reasons to deny heavier planes the use of PDK.

- The 66,000-pound weight limit was mandated in longstanding county policy.
- An FAA memorandum stated, "In general, . . . the lower the maximum weight of an airplane, the lower the noise."
- County policy required an environmental study be conducted before any change in weight limit.

The county legal department wrote an ordinance purportedly to address regularly scheduled service at PDK but instead wrote an ordinance that would gut the longstanding 1976 county ordinance and give the Airport Director free reign to allow any plane to use PDK with no effective controls over such actions. On October 12,

1999, the BOC voted to table indefinitely this proposed ordinance due to its numerous flaws.

September 6, 2000, Airport Director Remmel stated that he had "made a determination that the 75,000 pounds will be defined as the Maximum Gross Certificated Takeoff Weight for that type/model/series aircraft."

December 27, 2000, in response to an inquiry from Senator Max Cleland, the FAA incorrectly said "the [11th Circuit] court made a statement in its ruling that the weight bearing capacity of the runway was 66,000 pounds." In fact, the entire court ruling was based on the fact that the proposed runway extension would maintain the current weight limitation of 66,000 pounds dual wheel.

For some key documents relating to the PDK Weight Limit agreement, see <http://www.opendekalbinc.org/news/index.asp>, and click "Sampling of government records."