

Snow storm batters US east, piling onto holiday chaos

January 3 2022, by Michael Mathes



The Washington Monument is seen on the snow-covered National Mall in Washington, DC at sunset on January 3, 2022.

After a bruising holiday week of flight cancellations and record surges in Covid-19 cases, a powerful winter snow storm Monday further snarled

US transport, shuttering the federal government and bringing Washington to a standstill.

The storm packed an unexpectedly fierce punch and appeared to have caught much of the capital city off guard, temporarily stranding US President Joe Biden on Air Force One and dumping up to nine inches (23 centimeters) of snow on Washington.

Many Americans have been scrambling to return home after the Christmas and New Year period, with thousands of flights cancelled due to bad weather and airline staffing woes blamed in part on rising coronavirus infections among crews.

More than 4,900 flights Monday, the first workday of 2022, were cancelled globally as of 8:30 pm (0130 GMT Tuesday), including 3,173 flights within, into or out of United States, according to flight-tracking website FlightAware.

The latest cancellations—along with 6,775 US flight delays Monday—compounded holiday travel misery.

While much of the US Mid-Atlantic was caught in the bad weather, conditions were acute in the capital and neighboring states of Maryland and Virginia, where accumulation in some spots topped 12 inches, according to meteorologists who described it as the region's biggest snow storm in at least two years.



US President Joe Biden salutes as he disembarks from Air Force One at Joint Base Andrews during a snow storm that paralyzed much of the Washington region.

"This is a heavy snow," said Mayor Muriel Bowser of Washington, where plows scrambled to clear snow, trees and power lines tumbled, the US Senate postponed votes and health officials cancelled Covid testing.

"If it is not absolutely necessary for you to go out, stay home and off the roads," she warned.

Airports were experiencing blizzard conditions, with authorities at Washington and Baltimore airports reportedly ordering temporary ground stops during a midday whiteout.

Biden himself was snowed in aboard his presidential aircraft after landing at Joint Base Andrews near Washington, with debarking delayed by half an hour so the tarmac could be plowed.

The winter blast offered a distraction from Washington's endless political divides: in bucolic scenes, children were seen sledding on Capitol Hill, while adventurers cross-country skied on the National Mall.



The US Capitol towers over the snow-covered Mall after a winter storm over the capital region on January 3, 2022 in Washington, DC.

'I need to go home!'

But for everyday passengers, holiday travel morphed into a nightmare.

"Hey @SouthwestAir can you stop cancelling every single flight out of DCA (Washington National Airport)? I need to go home!" passenger Kyle Hughes wrote on Twitter.

Federal workers in and around the capital were told to stay home. But with telework becoming routine during the two-year coronavirus pandemic, it was unclear how much of the government would be affected.

Schools around the region were also closed due to snow.

Airports in Chicago and Atlanta—major transit hubs—as well as Denver, Detroit, Houston and Newark were hard hit over the weekend. By Monday the east coast airports in New York, Washington and Baltimore were scrapping the most flights.

A woman named Kayla described her own ordeal Sunday: "I was supposed to get home at 10:30 yesterday morning and at this point I've had 3 flights cancelled and one delayed to the point where I missed my connection."



A snow-plough removes snow on the grounds of the Lincoln Memorial after a winter storm over the capital region on January 3, 2022 in Washington, DC.

Around the world, air traffic has suffered snarls over the holidays because of airline staffing issues linked to the spread of the highly contagious Omicron coronavirus variant.

Many pilots and flight attendants have called in sick after testing positive or being forced to quarantine due to contact with someone who has the virus.

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