

## **With Worldwide Shortage of Pilots, Expect Cuts in Regular Flight Service: Cameron on Transportation**

**Author :** David Gurliacci

**Categories :** [Opinion](#), [Transportation](#)

**Tagged as :** [Cameron on Air Transportation](#), [Cameron on Air Transportation 2018](#), [Cameron on Transportation](#), [Cameron on Transportation 2018](#), [Jim Cameron 2018](#), [Jim Cameron's Transportation Column](#)

**Date :** October 16, 2018

International aviation is about to face a crisis: a shortage of pilots.

Domestically, regional carriers, which represent 42 percent of all passengers, are already canceling flights and eliminating service to smaller cities.

Qantas, the largest carrier in Australia, is pulling old 747s out of mothballs because it doesn't have enough qualified pilots for its 737s, the most dominate — and much more fuel efficient — aircraft in its fleet.

Europe's biggest airline, Ryanair, canceled thousands of flights last November because of inadequate staffing. Japanese airlines are so desperate for pilots they are raising the mandatory retirement age to 67.

In China's booming aviation market, airlines are luring experienced captains with salaries starting at \$500,000, including signing bonuses. That's attracting U.S. pilots, who are also offered free business-class flights home to America every three weeks to see their families.

The number of active U.S. commercial aviators dropped by 30,000 between 2008 and 2016 just as American carriers experienced a resurgence. About 1,000 Canadian pilots are estimated to now to be flying for overseas airlines, which offer better pay.

---

***See also:***

- [Jim Cameron Appointed to Merritt Parkway Conservancy Governing Board](#) (Oct. 14)

---

Even the U.S. military is feeling the pain with the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps suffering a 25 percent reduction in fighter pilot staffing. It costs up \$11 million to train a single fighter pilot. So where are they going? To the commercial airlines, especially overseas.

Boeing said the international aviation market will need 637,000 more pilots in the next 20 years as air traffic doubles. But where will these pilots be found?

Aside from the military, it's been small domestic airlines that have been the traditional training ground for big U.S. airlines. But after a series of crashes, the FAA changed the rules in 2010 to require pilots to have 1,500 hours of flight time before stepping up to the big time. The U.S. Department of Transportation is now considering reducing that minimum.

Just a few years ago, regional carriers paid their pilots as little as \$20,000 a year. The hours were long and the rewards few. There was a popular joke among small airline pilots: What's the difference between a pilot and a pizza? A pizza can feed a family of four.

The starting pay now at the regionals is closer to \$50,000. Still, those recruits need extensive and expensive training that costs triple what it was in the 1990s. Graduates of the aviation colleges are starting their careers with up to \$300,000 in student-loan debt.

Now even flight instructors are in short supply. So too are designated flight examiners, who conduct mandatory “check rides” for pilot applicants who now must schedule those “driving tests” up to six months in advance.

The use of simulators instead of actual in-air flight time may help trainees, though some suggest would-be pilots should start as early as high school in programs such as the U.S. Air Force’s Junior ROTC.

Bottom line: Until more pilots are properly trained, certified and paid a competitive wage, the pilot shortage will mean we will continue to see cuts in regular service, especially to smaller airports.

Getting there, if it’s not to a big city, will be inconvenient and expensive, if even possible.

---

***See also Jim Cameron’s other articles on air transportation:***

- [Jets With Faster, Longer Flights Seem the Way of the Future: Cameron on Transportation](#) (Sept. 3)
- [Hot Weather Can Stifle Airplane Takeoffs](#) (July 15)
- [Air Marshal Service, Created to Prevent Trouble, Is Itself Troubled](#) (June 17)
- [Look! Up in the Air!! And on the Train!!! Another Disruptive Passenger!!!!](#) (Jan. 14)
- [By 2020 You’ll Need a ‘Verified’ Drivers License If You Want It for ID Before a Flight](#) (Dec. 17, 2017)
- [Check Out This Airline If You’re Going to France](#) (July 28, 2017)
- [Think Air Travel’s Crazy? You Don’t Know the Half of It](#) (Oct. 7, 2017)
- [Cramming Passengers on Planes Is Not Just Uncomfortable, It’s Also Unsafe](#) (May 19, 2017)

---

*Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for more than 25 years. He is the founder of the Commuter Action Group, sits on the Merritt Parkway Conservancy board and also serves on the Darien RTM and as program director for Darien TV79. The opinions expressed in this column, republished with permission of Hearst CT Media, are only his own. You can reach him at [CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com](mailto:CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com).*