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Texte au verso

United Airlines to change its boarding process, a win for window seats

By Amanda Holpuch

The New York Times – October 17, 2023

United Airlines plans to speed up its boarding process by having passengers in economy class who have purchased window seats get on the plane before people in the middle and aisle seats.

The change, which is set to take effect Oct. 26, could cut up to two minutes from boarding time on each flight, according to an internal memo shared with The New York Times. It will affect domestic flights and some international ones.

Airlines, which have recovered from a drop in travel during the coronavirus pandemic, regularly tinker with boarding processes to try to save time and boost profits.

Under United's new seating plan, known as WILMA, a loose acronym for window-middle-aisle, people in economy class with window seats will board first, followed by people in middle seats and then those in aisle seats. Families traveling on the same flight will board together.

The boarding process will not change for passengers in first class and business class, and the preboarding group will still include people with disabilities, unaccompanied minors, active-duty military and families traveling with children 2 years old and under.

United has tested the WILMA method, which it first tried in 2017, at five airports and found it to be effective at reducing boarding times, according to the internal memo.

To make boarding more efficient, airlines have to cut the time passengers are waiting behind others in the aisle, as well as the time it takes for people to get out of their seats to make room for someone else in their row, according to John Milne, an associate professor of engineering and management at Clarkson University. He called United's change "a step forward."

It could go even further, though, he said, based on his research. The boarding groups for each type of seat could also be divided for the front and back halves of the plane, so that people who were in window seats in the back half of the plane would board first. This is known as the "reverse pyramid" method.