

Delta will pay flight attendants for working while boarding flights, a major change-up

(Courtesy of David Slotnick, The Points Guy)

Most airline passengers don't realize that flight attendants aren't paid for the time they spend helping you find space in an [overhead compartment for your bag](#), helping you figure out if you're in an aisle or window seat, or making sure you're ok with sitting in an emergency exit row.

At Delta, that's about to change.

The airline told flight attendants on Monday that it will begin to pay them for time spent working on a flight during boarding at the gate, according to multiple flight attendants at the carrier — a first for a U.S. airline.

Until now, flight attendants have only begun to be paid once the aircraft door has closed. While that may seem unconscionable, the argument has been that their pay rates once the door does close are higher than they would be otherwise, although there have been campaigns among flight attendants to extend payable hours to cover all times spent facing passengers — such as during boarding.

Beginning June 2, flight attendants at the Atlanta-based airline will earn between \$16.10 and \$36.19 per hour, depending on seniority, according to an internal memo seen by TPG. Additionally, the shortest minimum boarding time on [domestic narrow-body flights](#) will be increased from 35 minutes to 40 minutes, meaning an extra five minutes of work — now to be paid — on those flights.

Depending on the type of plane and flight as well as seniority, flight attendants can expect to make an additional \$10.79 to \$30.04 per flight.

Boarding pay will come in addition to a [4% pay increase](#) the airline announced for flight attendants last month.

The pay increase comes at a time when Delta is fending off a push among some flight attendants to unionize with the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA (AFA), a major union representing flight attendants at several airlines across the United States. Delta is the only major U.S. airline where flight attendants do not belong to a union or have a collective bargaining agreement in place.

In a statement, the AFA claimed credit for the raise, claiming that it came as “the direct result of our organizing” in an effort to dissuade employees from voting in favor of unionizing. The union also said that Delta had faced “anger” from flight attendants over the 40-minute boarding time when it was previewed last year, and added the pay benefit to counter pushback.

“It's also a reminder that management holds all the cards,” the union wrote in the [statement](#). “They announced this today, and they can also choose to cancel this policy at any time...unless we have a contract that locks it in.”

Other Delta flight attendants opposed to unionization rejected AFA's statements, however, pointing to the fact that other airlines with flight attendants who are organized under the union do not get paid for boarding.

Flight attendants have tried to organize a union at Delta three times in the past 20 years, with the majority of workers ultimately voting to reject the union each time, [most recently](#) in 2010. A fourth effort, in 2015, [was canceled](#) amid issues surrounding ballots.

The most recent campaign, however, comes as organized labor basks in a moment nationally, with recent successful drives at Amazon and Starbucks galvanizing organizers.