

Close call at Newark spurs safety questions at airports

Newsday
Long Island, New York, US

Wednesday, May 6, 2026
Page 2,3, Section: TOP STORIES
637 words, 64in² in size



Close call at Newark

ONLY IN NEWSDAY

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A United Airlines jetliner landing Sunday afternoon at Newark Liberty International Airport struck a light pole and a tractor trailer truck being driven on the New Jersey Turnpike hauling bakery goods, a terrifying crash captured on the driver's dashcam video.

Newark is one of the airports nationwide with approaches over crowded traffic areas, requiring maneuvering near urban infrastructure close by.

What are the chances that a similar incident could happen again?



Relatively low, but still higher than in a sparsely populated area where planes don't land in the vicinity of a metrop-

olis or its crowded suburbs.

What happened on Sunday?
Both the plane, with about



spurs safety questions at airports

230 people aboard, and the bakery's truck were damaged when the plane hit the tractor trailer, as well as a pole, causing it to tip over and strike a Jeep. United said the company is undertaking a "rigorous safety inspection" over what happened.

What's the latest in the probe?

The National Transportation Safety Board, which is investigating the case, has classified the incident as an accident that is being probed by agency staff. Investigators will examine "multiple factors, including flight operations, meteorological conditions, human performance, crew resource management, aircraft performance and air traffic control."

What are the chances of a similar incident?

Typically airports have "pretty big buffer" zones between the landing zone and the airport boundary fence, said George Hodyno, a retired airline pilot who was born and raised in Elmont.

"However, airports in densely populated areas have reduced overruns," Hodyno said, adding: "the margin for error in airports like these is reduced. Fly an approach too low or a sudden wind shear could make the approach a little dicey."

What about local area airports?

Even as the chances of a crash between a landing plane and an object below are low, La-

Guardia and Republic airports have the most comparative vulnerability in the region.

"MacArthur and Kennedy are not that bad," said Michael Canders, an aviation safety subject expert and former military pilot with almost 50 years of piloting experience

LaGuardia Airport

Canders noted the Grand Central Parkway's proximity to the airport and is "close to roadways." The parkway carries hundreds of thousands of vehicles each day, with airplanes flying overhead.

Kennedy Airport

Rockaway Boulevard, an exterior road in some of the southernmost parts of Queens and New York City, is close to Run-

ways 22R and 22L, planes are visible from the roadway. The road is perpendicular to the runways. Canders said that Kennedy is not as vulnerable as some other area airports.

Still, Hodyno said, that's "pretty darn close to the road."

Republic Airport

Of Long Island airports, Republic is among the closest to traffic and the built-up environment of Long Island. Canders said there are close roadways, including Route 109, with some proximity to the Southern State Parkway.

"Typically airports are built, and then there's an encroachment of property, there's an encroachment of development, that may be close to where the aircraft land, and so it is riskier, if

you will, typically not of concern to travelers, but not a bad idea to get in the habit of knowing to look out of the car, always."

Long Island MacArthur Airport

Canders, examining the map, pointed out that MacArthur is close to Route 454, a key thoroughfare in Suffolk County, along with adjacent roads near the airport.

The terrain is relatively flat near MacArthur, said Janie Daly, the director of Farmingdale State College's aviation center.

Compared with Newark, she said, "MacArthur really does not have the same overpasses or roadways that are elevated right up against the approach end of the runways."