A Closer Look at Southwest's New Gate Experience and Boarding Process

Southwest's transition from open seating to an assigned seating model is almost here, bringing several changes across our operation. As we near this major milestone on January 27, we're sharing more details on how assigned seating reshapes two key areas: our gate experience and boarding process.

Gate Area Experience: New Lanes for Line Up

Beginning January 27, Southwest will no longer use numbered metal stanchions (silver columns) for boarding lines. Instead, we'll have two alternating boarding lanes with digital screen displays (at gates where screens already exist today) that show which group is boarding. We'll also have a separate Preboarding and Priority Boarding area for active-duty military, Customers who purchase the new Priority Boarding product (available beginning 24 hours before departure for flights starting January 27), and Customers who need to preboard.

Gate areas will be converted in a phased approach, beginning the evening of January 26. It will take approximately 60 days to remove the numbered stanchions from all airports. The stanchions that are not removed overnight on January 26 will have their numbers removed or covered so they are not visible by the morning of January 27, when assigned seating begins.

The New Boarding Process, Optimized for Assigned Seating

As we've previously shared, Southwest is transitioning from A/B/C boarding groups to Groups 1-8. The goal of this change is to maintain an efficient and orderly boarding approach that's optimized for assigned seating, prioritizing Customers into boarding groups based on seat location, beginning

with Extra Legroom seats in boarding Groups 1 and 2. Customers with premium fares and our most loyal travelers will both enjoy access to preferential seats and earlier boarding.
Below are the boarding process details:

- Priority Boarding is available for purchase starting 24 hours before departure, when available.
- Newly designed boarding passes will show seat assignment and boarding group.
- Certain Passengers needing special accommodations will be able to self-identify digitally prior to their day of travel, with special service requests (SSRs)—like wheelchair assistance—visible on their boarding pass.
- Everyone on the same reservation of nine or less Customers, including families, will be assigned to the same boarding group.
- Our eight boarding groups will be based on seat location, fare type purchased, tier status, and Rapid Rewards® Credit Card benefits. Fare, tier, and Cardmember boarding benefits will extend to up to eight Passengers on the same reservation. Companion Pass holders and their Companions will receive the highest applicable boarding benefit based on their individual status.
    - Groups 1-2: A-List Preferred, Choice Extra fare, Extra Legroom seat purchase or upgrade (including A-List Members who upgrade at no additional cost to ELR seats within 48 hours prior to departure, when available)
    - Groups 3-5: A-List and Choice Preferred fare, plus Rapid Rewards® Credit Cardmembers who did not receive an earlier boarding group will also board in Group 5
    - Groups 6-8: Choice fare and Basic fare who did not receive an earlier boarding group

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Southwest Airlines Co. operates one of the world's most admired and awarded airlines, offering its one-of-a-kind value and Hospitality at 120 airports across 12 countries. Southwest took flight in 1971 to democratize the sky through friendly, reliable, and low-cost air travel and now carries more air travelers flying nonstop within the United States than any other airline(fn. 1). By empowering its more than 73,000(fn. 2) People to deliver unparalleled Hospitality, the maverick airline cherishes a passionate loyalty among more than 134 million Customers carried in 2025. Southwest leverages a unique legacy and mission to serve communities around the world including harnessing the power of its People and Purpose to put communities at the Heart of its success. Learn more by visiting Southwest.com/citizenship.

1. Based on U.S. Dept. of Transportation quarterly Airline Origin & Destination Survey as of Q4 2025
2. Fulltime-equivalent active Employees as of March 31, 2026

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