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Flight Delays, Mishandled Bags, Consumer Complaints Increase in 2007

U.S. airlines experienced a lower rate of on-time flights and more reports of mishandled baggage last year than in 2006, and passengers filed more complaints with the government about airline service than they did the previous year, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) Air Travel Consumer Report which was issued today.

According to information filed with the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), a part of DOT's Research and Innovative Technology Administration (RITA), the 20 airlines reporting on-time performance with DOT recorded an on-time arrival rate of 73.4 percent in 2007, down from their 75.4 percent mark in 2006. These carriers recorded a rate of 7.03 reports of mishandled baggage per 1,000 passengers last year, up from 2006's rate of 6.73. In addition, consumers filed 13,168 complaints about airline service with the Department, 58.2 percent more than the 8,325 filed in 2006.

The monthly report also includes data on the causes of flight delays, as well as information on flight cancellations and on consumer disability and discrimination complaints received by DOT's Aviation Consumer Protection Division. This report also includes data on airline reports of oversales ("bumping") during the fourth quarter and January-December 2007, as well as reports required to be filed by U.S. carriers of incidents involving pets traveling by air.

December Flight Delays

According to information filed with BTS, the carriers reporting on-time performance posted a 64.3 percent on-time arrival record in December, down from both December 2006's 70.8 and November 2007's 80.0 percent marks.

Causes of Flight Delays

In December, the carriers filing on-time performance data reported that 10.41 percent of their flights were delayed by aviation system delays, compared to 6.77 percent in November; 10.89 percent by late-arriving aircraft, compared to 6.07 percent in November; 9.15 percent by factors within the airline's control, such as maintenance or crew problems, compared to 5.39 percent in November; 1.38 percent by extreme weather, compared to 0.51 percent in November; and 0.08 percent for security reasons, compared to 0.04 percent in November. Weather is a factor in both the extreme-weather category and the aviation-system category. This includes delays due to the re-routing of flights by DOT's Federal Aviation Administration in consultation with the carriers involved. Weather is also a factor in delays attributed to late-arriving aircraft, although airlines do not report specific causes in that category.

AIR TRAVEL CONSUMER REPORT ADD ONE

Data collected by BTS also shows the percentage of late flights delayed by weather, including those reported in either the category of extreme weather or included in National Aviation System delays. In December, 43.57 percent of late flights were delayed by weather, up 12.55 percent from December 2006, when 38.71 percent of late flights were delayed by weather, and up 15.20 percent from November when 37.82 percent of late flights were delayed by weather.

Detailed information on flight delays and their causes is available on the BTS site on the World Wide Web at <http://www.bts.gov>.

December Flight Cancellations

The consumer report also includes BTS data on the number of domestic flights canceled by the reporting carriers. In December, the carriers canceled 3.5 percent of their scheduled domestic flights, up from both December 2006's 3.0 percent rate and November 2007's 1.0 percent mark.

Mishandled Baggage in December

The U.S. carriers reporting flight delays and mishandled baggage data posted a mishandled baggage rate of 9.01 reports per 1,000 passengers in December, up from both December 2006's rate of 8.93 and November 2007's 4.89 rate.

Bumping

The report also includes airline reports of involuntary denied boarding, or bumping, for 2007 and the fourth quarter of last year. In 2007, the U.S. carriers that report on-time performance, mishandled baggage data and bumping totals had a bumping rate of 1.12 per 10,000 passengers, up from the 1.00 rate for 2006. For the fourth quarter of 2007, the carriers recorded a bumping rate of 0.82 per 10,000 passengers, down from the 0.88 rate recorded during the fourth quarter of 2006.

Incidents Involving Pets

In December, carriers reported one incident involving pets while traveling by air, down from eight incidents in November. The December incident involved an injured pet.

December Complaints About Airline Service

In December, the department received 849 complaints about airline service from consumers, up 40 percent from the 607 complaints filed in December 2006 and up 5.1 percent from the total of 808 received in November 2007.

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AIR TRAVEL CONSUMER REPORT ADD TWO

Complaints About Treatment of Disabled Passengers

The report also contains a tabulation of complaints filed with DOT in December and January-December 2007 against specific airlines regarding the treatment of passengers with disabilities. The Department received a total of 18 disability-related complaints in December, down 37.9 percent from the total of 29 filed in December 2006 and 53.8 percent fewer than the 39 complaints filed in November 2006. For all of last year, the Department received 480 disability-related complaints, an increase of 11.6 percent from the total of 430 received in 2006.

Complaints About Discrimination

In December, the Department received two complaints alleging discrimination by airlines due to factors other than disability – such as race, religion, national origin or sex – down from both the totals of nine received in December 2006 and three filed in November 2007. For all of last year, the department received 99 discrimination complaints, down 13.2 percent from the 114 complaints received in 2006.

Consumers may file their complaints in writing with the Aviation Consumer Protection Division, U.S. Department of Transportation, C-75, W96-432, 1200 New Jersey Ave. SE, Washington, DC 20590; by voice mail at (202) 366-2220 or by TTY at (202) 366-0511; or on the web at <http://airconsumer.ost.dot.gov>.

Consumers who want on-time performance data for specific flights should call their airline ticket offices or their travel agents. This information is available on the computerized reservation systems used by these agents.

The Air Travel Consumer Report can be found on DOT's World Wide Web site at <http://airconsumer.ost.dot.gov>. It is available in "pdf" and Microsoft Word format.

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AIR TRAVEL CONSUMER REPORT
December 2007

KEY ON-TIME PERFORMANCE AND FLIGHT CANCELLATION STATISTICS
Based on Data Filed with the Bureau of Transportation Statistics
by the 20 Reporting Carriers

Overall

64.3 percent on-time arrivals

Highest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. Aloha Airlines – 93.0 percent
2. Hawaiian Airlines – 92.0 percent
3. US Airways – 74.5 percent

Lowest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. American Eagle Airlines – 53.6 percent
2. Pinnacle Airlines – 54.6 percent
3. United Airlines – 54.8 percent

Most Frequently Delayed Flights

1. ExpressJet Airlines flight 7758 from Los Angeles to Seattle – late 100 percent of the time
1. ExpressJet Airlines flight 7824 from Los Angeles to Spokane, WA – late 100 percent of the time
3. United Airlines flight 789 from Chicago O'Hare to Minneapolis/St. Paul – late 96.43 percent of the time
4. Comair flight 5597 from Boston to Philadelphia – late 95.45 percent of the time
4. Comair flight 5587 from Boston to Philadelphia – late 95.45 percent of the time

Highest Rates of Canceled Flights

1. American Eagle Airlines – 8.3 percent
2. Pinnacle Airlines – 7.9 percent
3. Mesa Airlines – 7.1 percent

Lowest Rates of Canceled Flights

1. Frontier Airlines – 1.0 percent
2. Hawaiian Airlines – 1.1 percent
3. Aloha Airlines – 1.3 percent

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