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News

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Airline On-Time Performance Improves in 2008

The on-time performance of the nation's largest airlines improved in 2008 compared to the previous year, according to the Air Travel Consumer Report released today by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT).

According to information filed with the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), a part of DOT's Research and Innovative Technology Administration (RITA), the 19 carriers reporting on-time performance recorded an overall on-time arrival rate of 76.0 percent for January through December 2008, up from 2007's 73.4 percent rate. During December 2008, the carriers posted an on-time performance rate of 65.3 percent, up from December 2007's 64.3 percent but down from November 2008's 83.3 percent.

The monthly report also includes data on lengthy tarmac delays, flight cancellations and the causes of flight delays by the reporting carriers, as well as information on reports of mishandled baggage filed with the carriers, airline bumping, and consumer service, disability and discrimination complaints received by DOT's Aviation Consumer Protection Division. This report also includes reports of incidents involving pets traveling by air, as required to be filed by U.S. carriers.

Cancellations

The consumer report includes BTS data on the number of domestic flights canceled by the reporting carriers. In December, the carriers canceled 3.3 percent of their scheduled domestic flights, down from the 3.5 percent cancellation rate of December 2007 but higher than the 0.8 percent rate posted in November 2008.

Tarmac Delays

In December, the carriers filing on-time performance data reported that .0003 percent of their scheduled flights had tarmac delays of three hours or more, up from .00002 percent in November. BTS is reviewing other parts of the tarmac data reported by carriers for October through December, the first three months carriers have reported this data. Data will be released when the review is completed.

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AIR TRAVEL CONSUMER REPORT ADD ONE

Causes of Flight Delays

In December, the carriers filing on-time performance data reported that 10.57 percent of their flights were delayed by aviation system delays, compared to 6.56 percent in November; 11.13 percent by late-arriving aircraft, compared to 4.79 percent in November; 7.65 percent by factors within the airline's control, such as maintenance or crew problems, compared to 3.89 percent in November; 1.53 percent by extreme weather, compared to 0.37 percent in November; and 0.07 percent for security reasons, compared to 0.02 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.

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, 45.36 percent of late flights were delayed by weather, up 4.18 percent from December 2007, when 43.54 percent of late flights were delayed by weather, and up 7.79 percent from November when 42.08 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>.

Mishandled Baggage

The U.S. carriers reporting flight delays and mishandled baggage data posted a mishandled baggage rate of 6.96 reports per 1,000 passengers in December, an improvement over December 2007's rate of 9.05 but higher than November 2008's 3.75 rate. For all of last year, the carriers posted a mishandled baggage rate of 5.26 per 1,000 passengers, an improvement over 2007's rate of 7.05.

Bumping

The report also includes airline reports of involuntary denied boarding, or bumping, for 2008 and the fourth quarter of last year. In 2008, the U.S. carriers that report on-time performance, mishandled baggage data and bumping totals had a bumping rate of 1.10 per 10,000 passengers, down from the 1.12 rate for 2007. For the fourth quarter of 2008, the carriers recorded a bumping rate of 1.10 per 10,000 passengers, up from the 0.83 rate recorded during the fourth quarter of 2007.

Incidents Involving Pets

In December, carriers reported one incident involving pets while traveling by air, compared to six incidents in November. December's incident involved the death of a pet.

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AIR TRAVEL CONSUMER REPORT ADD TWO

Complaints About Airline Service

In December, the Department received 700 complaints about airline service from consumers, down 17.8 percent from the 852 complaints filed in December 2007 but 31.6 percent more than the total of 532 received in November 2008. For all of last year, the Department received 10,643 air service complaints, 19.2 percent fewer than the 13,180 complaints filed in 2007.

Complaints About Treatment of Disabled Passengers

The report also contains a tabulation of complaints filed with DOT against airlines regarding the treatment of passengers with disabilities. The Department received a total of 33 disability-related complaints in December, 65.0 percent more than the 20 complaints received in December 2007 and 17.9 percent more than the total of 28 filed in November 2008. For all of last year, the Department received 474 disability-related complaints, down 2.9 percent from the total of 488 received in 2007.

Complaints About Discrimination

In December, the Department received seven complaints alleging discrimination by airlines due to factors other than disability – such as race, religion, national origin or sex – up from the two complaints recorded in December 2007 and equal to the total of seven filed in November 2008. For all of last year, the Department received 115 discrimination complaints, up 16.2 percent from the total of 99 filed in 2007.

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.dot.gov>.

Consumers who want on-time performance data for specific flights should call their airline's reservation number or their travel agent. 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.dot.gov>. It is available in "pdf" and Microsoft Word format.

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AIR TRAVEL CONSUMER REPORT
December 2008

KEY ON-TIME PERFORMANCE AND FLIGHT CANCELLATION STATISTICS
Based on Data Filed with the Bureau of Transportation Statistics
by the 19 Reporting Carriers

Overall

65.3 percent on-time arrivals

Highest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. Hawaiian Airlines – 79.6 percent
2. US Airways – 72.1 percent
3. American Airlines – 69.9 percent

Lowest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. Comair – 55.1 percent
2. Alaska Airlines – 58.4 percent
3. American Eagle Airlines – 59.3 percent

Most Frequently Delayed Flights

1. SkyWest Airlines flight 4669 from Atlanta to San Antonio, TX – late 94.12 percent of the time
2. American Eagle Airlines flight 4458 from Detroit to Chicago O’Hare – late 93.33 percent of the time
2. Comair flight 6475 from Milwaukee to Atlanta – late 93.33 percent of the time
2. ExpressJet Airlines flight 2019 from Hartford, CT/Springfield, MA to Newark, NJ – late 93.33 percent of the time
2. Northwest Airlines flight 599 from Minneapolis/St. Paul to Portland, OR – late 93.33 percent of the time
2. Northwest Airlines flight 361 from Minneapolis/St. Paul to San Francisco – late 93.33 percent of the time
2. Northwest Airlines flight 215 Detroit to Seattle – late 93.33 percent of the time
2. Northwest Airlines flight 163 from Minneapolis/St. Paul to Seattle – late 93.33 percent of the time

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**AIR TRAVEL CONSUMER REPORT FACT SHEET
ADD ONE**

Flights with Longest Tarmac Delays

1. ExpressJet Airlines flight 2418 from Houston to Monroe, LA, 12/10/08 – delayed on tarmac 429 minutes
2. Continental Airlines flight 1010 from Houston to Newark, NJ, 12/10/08 – delayed on tarmac 409 minutes
3. ExpressJet Airlines flight 2710 from Houston to Baton Rouge, LA, 12/10/08 – delayed on tarmac 393 minutes
4. Continental Airlines flight 616 from Houston to Minneapolis/St. Paul, 12/10/08 – delayed on tarmac 386 minutes
5. Continental Airlines flight 644 from Houston to Cleveland, 12/10/08 – delayed on tarmac 376 minutes

Highest Rates of Canceled Flights

1. American Eagle Airlines – 6.7 percent
2. Comair – 6.3 percent
3. Pinnacle Airlines – 5.8 percent

Lowest Rates of Canceled Flights

1. Frontier Airlines – 1.0 percent
2. AirTran Airways – 1.4 percent
3. Northwest Airlines – 1.6 percent

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