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Contact: Bill Mosley
Tel: (202) 366-4570

Airlines Post Best December On-Time Record, Lowest December Cancellation Rate in 17 Years

No Tarmac Delays Longer than Three Hours on Domestic Flights or Four Hours on International Flights in December

The nation's largest airlines posted an on-time arrival record last December of 84.4 percent, the highest on-time percentage for any December during the 17 years the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) has collected comparable flight delay data. According to DOT's Air Travel Consumer Report, the carriers also had a 0.8 percent rate of canceled flights, the lowest December cancellation rate for the last 17 years.

The December on-time rate posted by the 16 reporting carriers was up from the 72.0 percent rate of December 2010, but down slightly from November 2011's 85.3 percent, according to data filed with the Department's Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS). The carriers' on-time percentage for all of 2011 was 79.6 percent, compared to 79.8 percent in 2010.

December's 0.8 percent cancellation rate was down from December 2010's 3.7 percent rate but up from November 2011's 0.7 percent.

Airlines also reported no tarmac delays of more than three hours on domestic flights or more than four hours on international flights in December. The larger U.S. airlines have been required to report long tarmac delays on their domestic flights since October 2008. Under a new rule that took effect Aug. 23, 2011, all U.S. and foreign airlines operating at least one aircraft with 30 or more passenger seats must report lengthy tarmac delays at U.S. airports. Also beginning Aug. 23, carriers operating international flights may not allow tarmac delays at U.S. airports to last longer than four hours. There is a separate three-hour limit on tarmac delays involving domestic flights, which went into effect in April 2010. Exceptions to the time limits for both domestic and international flights are allowed only for safety, security or air traffic control-related reasons.

The monthly Air Travel Consumer Report also includes data on chronically delayed flights and the causes of flight delays filed with BTS by the reporting carriers. In addition, the report contains information on airline bumping, reports of mishandled baggage filed by consumers with the carriers 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. Calendar year 2011 data are contained in the report in a number of areas as well as data for December 2011.

Chronically Delayed Flights

At the end of December, there was one flight that was chronically delayed – more than 30 minutes late more than 50 percent of the time – for two consecutive months. No flights were chronically delayed

for three consecutive months or more. A list of flights that were chronically delayed for a single month is available from BTS (www.bts.gov).

Causes of Flight Delays

In December, the carriers filing on-time performance data reported that 4.69 percent of their flights were delayed by aviation system delays, compared to 4.90 percent in November; 5.19 percent by late-arriving aircraft, compared to 4.72 percent in November; 4.46 percent by factors within the airline's control, such as maintenance or crew problems, compared to 3.97 percent in November; 0.33 percent by extreme weather, compared to 0.26 percent in November; and 0.03 percent for security reasons, equal to 0.03 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, 34.60 percent of late flights were delayed by weather, down 5.64 percent from December 2010, when 36.67 percent of late flights were delayed by weather, and down 7.46 percent from November when 37.39 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 3.37 reports per 1,000 passengers in December, down from December 2010's rate of 4.72, but up from November 2011's rate of 2.72. For all of last year, the carriers posted a mishandled baggage rate of 3.39 per 1,000 passengers, an improvement over 2010's rate of 3.51.

Bumping

The report also includes airline reports of involuntary denied boarding, or bumping, for calendar year 2011 and the fourth quarter of last year. The 16 U.S. carriers who report on-time performance and mishandled baggage data posted a bumping rate of 0.81 per 10,000 passengers last year, down from the 1.09 rate posted in 2010. For the fourth quarter of last year, the carriers posted a bumping rate of 0.71 per 10,000 passengers, down from the 0.80 rate for the fourth quarter of 2010.

Incidents Involving Pets

In December, carriers reported five incidents involving the loss, death or injury of pets while traveling by air, down from the seven reports filed in December 2010, but up from November 2011's total of two. December's incidents involved three pet deaths, one pet injury, and one lost pet. For all of last year, carriers reported 35 pet deaths, nine pet injuries, and two lost pets. In 2010, carriers reported 39 pet deaths, 13 pet injuries, and five lost pets.

Complaints About Airline Service

In December, the Department received 710 complaints about airline service from consumers, down 6.1 percent from the 756 complaints received in December 2010, and down 18.7 percent from the total of 873 filed in November 2011. For all of last year, the Department received 11,545 complaints, 5.1 percent higher than the 10,988 complaints received in 2010.

Complaints About Treatment of Disabled Passengers

The report also contains a tabulation of complaints filed with DOT in December against airlines regarding the treatment of passengers with disabilities. The Department received a total of 58 disability-related complaints in December 2011, up from both the 38 disability complaints received in December 2010 and the total of 45 filed in November 2011. For all of last year, the Department received 630 disability complaints, up 10.1 percent from the total of 572 received in 2010.

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 – down from both the total of 14 filed in December 2010, and the nine discrimination complaints received in November 2011. For all of last year, the Department received 127 discrimination complaints, down 11.2 percent from the total of 143 filed in 2010.

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 information is also available on the appropriate carrier's website.

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.

Facts

AIR TRAVEL CONSUMER REPORT December 2011

KEY ON-TIME PERFORMANCE AND FLIGHT CANCELLATION STATISTICS Based on Data Filed with the Bureau of Transportation Statistics by the 16 Reporting Carriers

Overall

84.4 percent on-time arrivals

Highest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. AirTran Airways – 91.9 percent
2. Hawaiian Airlines – 91.0 percent
3. Delta Air Lines – 88.5 percent

Lowest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. Frontier Airlines – 73.2 percent
2. ExpressJet Airlines – 76.3 percent
3. Continental Airlines – 79.8 percent

Domestic Flights with Longest Tarmac Delays

There were no domestic flights with tarmac delays of more than three hours in December.

International Flights with Longest Tarmac Delays

There were no international flights with tarmac delays of more than four hours in December.

Highest Rates of Canceled Flights

1. SkyWest Airlines – 2.2 percent
2. ExpressJet Airlines – 1.5 percent
3. American Eagle Airlines – 1.2 percent

Lowest Rates of Canceled Flights

1. Hawaiian Airlines – 0.0 percent*
2. Frontier Airlines – 0.2 percent
3. JetBlue Airways – 0.2 percent

*Hawaiian Airlines canceled two flights in December.

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