

DOT 54-12
Monday, May 14, 2012
Contact: Bill Mosley
Tel: (202) 366-4570

Airlines Post Record First-Quarter On-Time Performance for First Three Months of 2012

Between January and March this year, the nation's largest airlines posted their best on-time arrival rate for the first quarter of any year since the Department began collecting comparable flight delay data in 1995, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Air Travel Consumer Report released today.

The 15 carriers reporting on-time performance posted an on-time arrival rate of 84.0 percent during the first quarter of 2012. The previous first-quarter record was the 81.3 percent on-time arrival mark set during January-March 2002.

The carriers posted an on-time arrival rate of 82.2 percent in March, an improvement over March 2011's on-time rate of 79.2 percent rate but down from February 2012's 86.2 percent mark.

Airlines reported three tarmac delays of more than three hours on domestic flights and no tarmac delays of more than four hours on international flights in March. All of the long domestic tarmac delays took place on March 17 in St. Louis, a day when severe storms took place in the area.

The larger U.S. airlines have been required to file complete reports on their long tarmac delays for domestic flights since October 2008. Under a new rule that took effect August 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 August 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 report also includes data on chronically delayed flights and the causes of flight delays filed with the Department's Bureau of Transportation Statistics (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.

Chronically Delayed Flights

At the end of March, there were no flights that were chronically delayed – more than 30 minutes late more than 50 percent of the time – for two 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 March, the carriers filing on-time performance data reported that 4.99 percent of their flights were delayed by aviation system delays, compared to 4.13 percent in February; 6.16 percent by late-arriving aircraft, compared to 4.33 percent in February; 4.90 percent by factors within the airline's control, such as maintenance or crew problems, compared to 3.85 percent in February; 0.51 percent by extreme weather, compared to 0.35 percent in February; and 0.02 percent for security reasons, compared to 0.03 percent in February. 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 March, 35.37 percent of late flights were delayed by weather, down 3.89 percent from March 2011, when 36.80 percent of late flights were delayed by weather, and up 8.33 percent from February when 32.65 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 3.09 reports per 1,000 passengers in March, better than March 2011's rate of 3.32 but up from February 2012's rate of 2.64, which was the best mark for a single month since the Department began collecting this data in September 1987. For the first quarter of this year, the carriers posted a mishandled baggage rate of 3.01 reports per 1,000 passengers, an improvement over the 3.73 rate for the first quarter of 2011.

Bumping

The report also includes airline reports of involuntary denied boarding, or bumping, for the first quarter of this year. The 15 U.S. carriers who report on-time performance and mishandled baggage data posted a bumping rate of 0.91 per 10,000 passengers for the quarter, up from the 0.84 rate reported for the first quarter of 2011.

Incidents Involving Pets

In March, carriers reported nine incidents involving the loss, death, or injury of pets while traveling by air, up from both the six reports filed in March 2011 and three in February 2012. March's incidents involved three pet deaths and six injuries.

Complaints About Airline Service

In March, the Department received 1,117 complaints about airline service from consumers, up 39.1 percent from the 803 complaints received in March 2011 and up 61.6 percent from the 691 complaints filed in February 2012. A total of 213 of the March complaints involved the charter operator

Direct Air ceasing operations. For the first quarter of this year, the Department received 2,743 complaints, up 16.8 percent from the 2,348 filed during the first quarter of 2011.

Complaints About Treatment of Disabled Passengers

The report also contains a tabulation of complaints filed with DOT in March against airlines regarding the treatment of passengers with disabilities. The Department received a total of 48 disability-related complaints in March 2012, down from the total of 50 filed in March 2011 but up from the 38 complaints received in February 2012. For the first quarter of this year, the Department received 127 disability-related complaints, down from the total of 130 filed during the first quarter of 2011.

Complaints About Discrimination

In March, the Department received four complaints alleging discrimination by airlines due to factors other than disability – such as race, religion, national origin or sex – down from the 10 filed in March 2011 and identical to the total of four received in February 2012. For the first quarter of this year, the Department received 18 discrimination complaints, down from the total of 32 filed during the first quarter of 2011.

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 March 2012

KEY ON-TIME PERFORMANCE AND FLIGHT CANCELLATION STATISTICS Based on Data Filed with the Bureau of Transportation Statistics by the 15 Reporting Carriers

Overall

82.2 percent on-time arrivals

Highest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. Hawaiian Airlines – 92.5 percent
2. AirTran Airways – 90.9 percent
3. US Airways – 87.3 percent

Lowest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. ExpressJet Airlines – 74.1 percent
2. Virgin America – 74.9 percent
3. United Airlines – 77.4 percent

Domestic Flights with Tarmac Delays Exceeding Three Hours

1. American Airlines flight 2040 from Dallas-Fort Worth to St. Louis, 3/17/2012 – delayed on tarmac 219 minutes.
2. Shuttle America flight 5884 from New York LaGuardia to St. Louis, 3/17/12 – delayed on tarmac 187 minutes
3. ExpressJet Airlines flight 5157 from Minneapolis-St. Paul to St. Louis, 3/17/12 – delayed on tarmac 183 minutes.

(There were only three domestic flights with tarmac delays of more than three hours in March.)

International Flights with Tarmac Delays Exceeding Four Hours

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

Highest Rates of Canceled Flights

1. SkyWest Airlines – 2.7 percent
2. American Eagle Airlines – 1.7 percent
3. ExpressJet Airlines – 1.7 percent

Lowest Rates of Canceled Flights

1. Frontier Airlines – 0.0 percent*
2. Hawaiian Airlines – 0.2 percent
3. Delta Air Lines – 0.2 percent

*Frontier canceled one flight in March

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