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

Long Tarmac Delays Dramatically Diminished During First Year of DOT's Aviation Consumer Rule

During the first 12 months after a new rule limiting airline tarmac delays went into effect, lengthy delays experienced by passengers aboard aircraft largely disappeared and only a minimal number of flights were canceled to avoid delays on the tarmac, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) announced today.

See the DOT [press release](#) for Secretary Ray LaHood's statement.

According to DOT's Air Travel Consumer Report, there were only 20 total tarmac delays of more than three hours reported from May 2010 through April 2011 by the airlines that file on-time performance data with DOT, compared to 693 reported from May 2009 through April 2010. April was the 12th full month of data since the new rule went into effect on April 29, 2010.

At the same time, the number of canceled flights with tarmac delays of more than two hours – those most likely to be canceled to avoid violating the rule – increased only slightly, from 336 between May 2009 and April 2010 to 387 between May 2010 and April 2011. These additional 51 cancellations compare to over 6 million flights operated by the reporting carriers in a given year.

The rule prohibits U.S. airlines operating domestic flights from allowing an aircraft to remain on the tarmac for more than three hours without providing an opportunity for passengers to deplane, with exceptions allowed only for safety or security or if air traffic control advises the pilot in command that returning to the terminal would disrupt airport operations. International flights of both U.S. and foreign carriers at U.S. airports will be subject to a four-hour tarmac delay limit beginning Aug. 23.

The monthly report also includes data on on-time performance, chronically delayed flights, flight cancellations, and the causes of flight delays filed with the Department by the reporting carriers. In addition, the report contains information on 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.

April Tarmac Delays

Data filed with the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), a part of DOT's Research and Innovative Technology Administration, showed that there were four tarmac delays of more than three hours reported in April, equal to the four delays reported in April 2010, but up from the zero reported in March 2011. In April, the carriers also reported that .0700 percent of their scheduled flights had tarmac delays of two hours or more, up from the .0300 percent reported in March 2011.

On-Time Performance

Information filed with BTS shows that the 16 carriers reporting on-time performance recorded an overall on-time arrival rate of 75.5 percent in April, down from the 85.3 percent on-time rate of April 2010 and March 2011's 79.2 percent rate.

Cancellations

During April, the carriers canceled 2.0 percent of their scheduled domestic flights, compared to 0.7 percent in April 2010 and 1.3 percent in March 2011. There were 40 canceled flights with tarmac delays of more than two hours in April 2011, up from 12 in April 2010.

Chronically Delayed Flights

At the end of April, there were only six flights that were chronically delayed – more than 30 minutes late more than 50 percent of the time – for two consecutive months. There were no chronically delayed flights 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 April, the carriers filing on-time performance data reported that 7.57 percent of their flights were delayed by aviation system delays, compared to 6.15 percent in March; 8.35 percent by late-arriving aircraft, compared to 7.41 percent in March; 5.68 percent by factors within the airline's control, such as maintenance or crew problems, compared to 5.35 percent in March; 0.55 percent by extreme weather, compared to 0.32 percent in March; and 0.04 percent for security reasons, equal to 0.04 percent in March. 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 April, 39.87 percent of late flights were delayed by weather, up 13.23 percent from April 2010, when 35.21 percent of late flights were delayed by weather, and up 8.34 percent from March when 36.80 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 3.24 reports per 1,000 passengers in April, up from April 2010's rate of 2.84, but down from March 2011's rate of 3.32.

Incidents Involving Pets

In April, carriers reported four incidents involving the loss, death or injury of pets while traveling by air, down from the seven reports filed in both April 2010 and March 2011. April's incidents involved the death of three pets and the injury of one pet.

Complaints About Airline Service

In April, the Department received 879 complaints about airline service from consumers, up 0.1 percent from the 878 complaints filed in April 2010, and up 9.5 percent from the 803 received in March 2011.

Complaints About Treatment of Disabled Passengers

The report also contains a tabulation of complaints filed with DOT in April against airlines regarding the treatment of passengers with disabilities. The Department received a total of 54 disability-related complaints in April, down from the total of 55 complaints filed in April 2010, but up from the 50 complaints received in March 2011.

Complaints About Discrimination

In April, the Department received 10 complaints alleging discrimination by airlines due to factors other than disability – such as race, religion, national origin or sex – down from the total of 13 recorded in April 2010, and equal to the total of 10 recorded in March 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 April 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

75.5 percent on-time arrivals

Highest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. Hawaiian Airlines – 94.1 percent
2. Alaska Airlines – 89.5 percent
3. AirTran Airways – 82.0 percent

Lowest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. ExpressJet Airlines – 68.0 percent
2. JetBlue Airways – 68.4 percent
3. Atlantic Southeast Airlines – 68.5 percent

Flights with Longest Tarmac Delays

1. United Airlines flight 19 from New York JFK to San Francisco, 4/24/11 – delayed on tarmac 202 minutes
1. Delta Air Lines flight 1076 from Atlanta to Salt Lake City, 4/27/11 – delayed on tarmac 202 minutes
3. Delta Air Lines flight 1714 from Atlanta to Ontario, California, 4/27/11 – delayed on tarmac 200 minutes
4. Delta Air Lines flight 823 from Atlanta to Fort Lauderdale, 4/27/11 – delayed on tarmac 185 minutes

(There were only four flights with tarmac delays of more than three hours in April)

Highest Rates of Canceled Flights

1. American Eagle Airlines – 5.1 percent
2. ExpressJet Airlines – 3.8 percent
3. Atlantic Southeast Airlines – 3.7 percent

Lowest Rates of Canceled Flights

1. Hawaiian Airlines – 0.1 percent
2. Frontier Airlines – 0.2 percent
3. Continental Airlines – 0.5 percent

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