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No Tarmac Delays Longer Than Three Hours in Four of the Last Six Months

March was the fourth month out of the last six that the nation's airlines reported no tarmac delays of more than three hours, according to the Air Travel Consumer Report released today by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT). A year ago, in March 2010, the carriers reported 25 tarmac delays longer than three hours. Carriers also reported a decrease in the rate of canceled flights in March compared to a year earlier.

Data filed with the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), a part of DOT's Research and Innovative Technology Administration, showed there have been only 16 total tarmac delays of more than three hours reported from May 2010 through March 2011 by the airlines that file on-time performance data with DOT, compared to 689 reported from May 2009 through March 2010. In March, the carriers also reported that .0300 percent of their scheduled flights had tarmac delays of two hours or more, down from the .0400 percent reported in February 2011.

March was the 11th full month of data since the new aviation consumer rule went into effect on April 29, 2010. The new rule prohibits U.S. airlines operating domestic flights from permitting an aircraft to remain on the tarmac for more than three hours without permitting 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. The Department will investigate tarmac delays that exceed this limit.

The monthly report also includes data on on-time performance, chronically delayed flights, flight cancellations, bumping, 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.

On-Time Performance

Information filed with BTS shows that the 16 carriers reporting on-time performance recorded an overall on-time arrival rate of 79.2 percent in March, down slightly from the 80.0 percent on-time rate of March 2010, but up from February 2011's 74.5 percent rate.

Cancellations

During March, the carriers canceled 1.3 percent of their scheduled domestic flights, compared to 1.5 percent in March 2010 and 4.9 percent in February 2011. The number of canceled flights with tarmac delays of more than two hours increased only slightly, from 324 between May 2009 and March 2010 to 347 between May 2010 and March 2011. There were 16 canceled flights with tarmac delays of more than two hours in March 2011, down from 35 in March 2010.

Chronically Delayed Flights

At the end of March, there were only two 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 March, the carriers filing on-time performance data reported that 6.15 percent of their flights were delayed by aviation system delays, compared to 6.73 percent in February; 7.41 percent by late-arriving aircraft, compared to 7.44 percent in February; 5.35 percent by factors within the airline's control, such as maintenance or crew problems, compared to 5.44 percent in February; 0.32 percent by extreme weather, compared to 0.69 percent in February; and 0.04 percent for security reasons, compared to 0.05 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, 36.80 percent of late flights were delayed by weather, down 9.47 percent from March 2010, when 40.65 percent of late flights were delayed by weather, and up 1.15 percent from February when 36.38 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 3.32 reports per 1,000 passengers in March, down from both March 2010's rate of 3.66 and February 2011's rate of 3.59. For the first quarter of this year, the carriers posted a mishandled baggage rate of 3.71, down from the 4.03 rate for first quarter of 2010.

Bumping

The report also includes airline reports of involuntary denied boarding, or bumping, for the first quarter of this year. The 16 U.S. carriers who report on-time performance and mishandled baggage data posted a bumping rate of 0.90 per 10,000 passengers for the quarter, down from the 1.76 rate for the first quarter of 2010, but up from the 0.79 rate posted during the fourth quarter of 2010.

Incidents Involving Pets

In March, carriers reported seven incidents involving the loss, death or injury of pets while traveling by air, up from both the one report filed in March 2010 and the two reports filed in February 2011. March's incidents involved the death of six pets and the injury of one pet.

Complaints About Airline Service

In March, the Department received 803 complaints about airline service from consumers, down 16.7 percent from the 964 complaints filed in March 2010, and up 16.9 percent from the 687 received in February 2011. For the first quarter of this year, the Department received 2,346 air service complaints, down 11.9 percent from the 2,662 complaints received during the first quarter of 2010.

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 50 disability-related complaints in March, up from both the total of 47 complaints filed in March 2010 and the 40 complaints received in February 2011. For the first quarter of this year, the Department received 130 disability-related complaints, up 5.7 percent from the 123 filed during the first quarter of 2010.

Complaints About Discrimination

In March, 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 15 recorded in March 2010, and equal to the total of 10 recorded in February 2011. For the first quarter of this year, the Department received 31 discrimination complaints, up from the total of 27 received during the first quarter of 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 March 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

79.2 percent on-time arrivals

Highest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. Hawaiian Airlines – 88.4 percent
2. United Airlines – 84.0 percent
3. Mesa Airlines – 83.5 percent

Lowest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. JetBlue Airways – 71.3 percent
2. Atlantic Southeast Airlines – 72.2 percent
3. ExpressJet Airlines – 76.6 percent

Flights with Longest Tarmac Delays

*There were no flights with tarmac delays of more than three hours in March.

Highest Rates of Canceled Flights

1. SkyWest Airlines – 2.5 percent
2. ExpressJet Airlines – 2.5 percent
3. Mesa Airlines – 2.4 percent

Lowest Rates of Canceled Flights

1. Frontier Airlines – 0.1 percent
2. Continental Airlines – 0.2 percent
3. Hawaiian Airlines – 0.4 percent

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