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Long Tarmac Delays in August Show Steep Drop from Last Year

The nation's largest airlines reported only one flight in August with a tarmac delay of more than three hours, compared to 66 flights in August 2009, with no change in the rate of canceled flights, according to the Air Travel Consumer Report released today by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT).

Data filed with the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) showed the only tarmac delay longer than three hours reported in August by the 18 airlines that file on-time performance with DOT involved a United Airlines flight departing the San Juan airport on Aug. 5 that was diverted. August was the fourth full month of data since the new aviation consumer rule went into effect on April 29. There were only eight total tarmac delays of more than three hours from May through August this year, compared to 529 during the same four-month period of 2009. BTS is a part of DOT's Research and Innovative Technology Administration (RITA).

The largest carriers canceled 1.0 percent of their scheduled domestic flights in August, matching the 1.0 percent cancellation rate of August 2009. They posted a 1.4 percent cancellation rate in July 2010.

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

The new tarmac delay rule prohibits U.S. airlines operating domestic flights from permitting an aircraft to remain on the tarmac for more than three hours without deplaning passengers, 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 and the causes of flight delays filed with the Department by the reporting carriers. In addition, it has 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.

On-time Performance

The reporting carriers recorded an overall on-time arrival rate of 81.7 percent in August, up from both the 79.7 percent on-time rate of August 2009 and July 2010's 76.7 percent.

Tarmac Delays

In August, the carriers filing on-time performance data reported that .0400 percent of their scheduled flights had tarmac delays of two hours or more, down from .1030 percent in July. There was one flight with a tarmac delay of more than three hours in August.

Chronically Delayed Flights

At the end of August, there were four flights that were chronically delayed – more than 30 minutes late more than 50 percent of the time – for three consecutive months. There were an additional 41 flights that were chronically delayed for two consecutive months. There were no chronically delayed flights for four 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 August, the carriers filing on-time performance data reported that 5.07 percent of their flights were delayed by aviation system delays, compared to 6.21 percent in July; 6.42 percent by late-arriving aircraft, compared to 8.13 percent in July; 5.16 percent by factors within the airline's control, such as maintenance or crew problems, compared to 6.37 percent in July; 0.46 percent by extreme weather, compared to 0.79 percent in July; and 0.04 percent for security reasons, compared to 0.05 percent in July. 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 August, 35.07 percent of late flights were delayed by weather, down 10.70 percent from August 2009, when 39.27 percent of late flights were delayed by weather, and down 6.75 percent from July when 37.61 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 3.50 reports per 1,000 passengers in August, an improvement over both August 2009's rate of 4.11 and July 2010's 3.79 rate.

Incidents Involving Pets

In August, carriers reported one incident involving the loss, death or injury of pets while traveling by air, down from both the three reports filed in August 2009 and eight in July 2010. August's incident involved the injury of a pet.

Complaints About Airline Service

In August, the Department received 1,200 complaints about airline service from consumers, up 34.7 percent from the 891 complaints filed in August 2009 and up 9.7 percent from the 1,094 received in July 2010.

Complaints About Treatment of Disabled Passengers

The report also contains a tabulation of complaints filed with DOT in August against airlines regarding the treatment of passengers with disabilities. The Department received a total of 71 disability-related complaints in August, up from the total of 50 filed in August 2009 and the 56 complaints received in July 2010.

Complaints About Discrimination

In August, the Department received 17 complaints alleging discrimination by airlines due to factors other than disability – such as race, religion, national origin or sex – up from the total of 16 recorded in August 2009 and 12 recorded in July 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 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 August 2010

KEY ON-TIME PERFORMANCE AND FLIGHT CANCELLATION STATISTICS Based on Data Filed with the Bureau of Transportation Statistics by the 18 Reporting Carriers

Overall

81.7 percent on-time arrivals

Highest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. Hawaiian Airlines – 95.6 percent
2. Alaska Airlines – 88.7 percent
3. Continental Airlines – 87.1 percent

Lowest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. Comair – 76.4 percent
2. JetBlue Airways – 77.1 percent
3. Delta Air Lines – 77.4 percent

Flights with Longest Tarmac Delays

1. United Airlines flight 700 from San Juan to Washington Dulles, 8/5/10 – delayed on tarmac 200 minutes

(There was only one flight with a tarmac delay of more than three hours in August)

Highest Rates of Canceled Flights

1. Pinnacle Airlines – 2.5 percent
2. Comair – 2.1 percent
3. Delta Air Lines – 1.6 percent

Lowest Rates of Canceled Flights

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

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