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News

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2015 Airline Consumer Complaints Up From Previous Year

WASHINGTON – Airline consumer complaints filed with DOT’s Aviation Consumer Protection Division during 2015 were up 29.8 percent from 2014, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation’s *Air Travel Consumer Report* released today.

For all of last year, the Department received 20,170 complaints, up from the total of 15,539 received in 2014. In December 2015, the Department received 1,565 complaints about airline service from consumers, up 46.9 percent from the total of 1,065 filed in December 2014 and up 19.6 percent from the 1,308 received in November 2015. These complaints cover a range of aviation service issues such as flight problems, baggage, reservation and ticketing, refunds, consumer service, disability, and discrimination. Consumers can compare the overall complaint records of individual airlines to determine which airlines provide the best service and select airlines based on that knowledge. The complaints also serve as a basis for investigations, rulemaking, legislation, and research.

The consumer report also includes data on on-time performance, cancellations, tarmac delays, 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 consumer report includes statistics on mishandled baggage reports filed by consumers with the reporting carriers as well as passengers denied confirmed space (oversales/bumping) as filed with BTS by the carriers. The consumer report also contains information about the total number of animals that died, were injured or were lost during air transport in December, as well as the calendar year, as filed by the air carriers with the Aviation Consumer Protection Division.

On-Time Performance

The reporting carriers posted an on-time arrival rate of 77.8 percent in December 2015, up from the 75.3 percent on-time rate in December 2014, but down from the 83.7 percent mark in November 2015. For the full year 2015, the reporting carriers posted an on-time arrival rate of 79.9 percent, up from 76.2 percent in 2014.

Cancellations

The reporting carriers canceled 1.7 percent of their scheduled domestic flights in December 2015, up from both the 1.4 percent cancellation rate posted in December 2014 and the 1.0 percent rate in November 2015. For the full year 2015, the reporting carriers canceled 1.5 percent of their scheduled domestic flights, an improvement over the 2.2 percent cancellation rate in 2014.

Tarmac Delays

In December, airlines reported 11 tarmac delays of more than three hours on domestic flights and three tarmac delays of more than four hours on international flights. In 2015, there were 61 domestic flights with tarmac delays longer than three hours and 15 international flights with tarmac delays longer than four hours at U.S. airports. All reported extended tarmac delays are investigated by the Department.

Chronically Delayed Flights

At the end of December, there were no regularly scheduled flight that were chronically delayed – more than 30 minutes late more than 50 percent of the time – for two consecutive months or more. This is the third month in a row in which there were no chronically delayed flights for two consecutive months or more. A list of flights that were chronically delayed for a single month is [available](#) from [BTS](#).

Causes of Flight Delays

In December, the carriers filing on-time performance data reported total delays of 22.17 percent – 5.70 percent of their flights were delayed by aviation system delays, compared to 4.84 percent in November; 7.64 percent by late-arriving aircraft, compared to 5.18 percent in November; 6.13 percent by factors within the airline's control, such as maintenance or crew problems, compared to 4.60 percent in November; 0.66 percent by extreme weather, compared to 0.42 percent in November; and 0.06 percent for security reasons, compared to 0.04 percent in November. In addition, 1.68 percent of flights were canceled and 0.30 percent were diverted.

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.

BTS uses the data collected from airlines to determine the percentage of late flights delayed by weather, which includes those reported in the categories of extreme weather, late-arriving aircraft, and National Aviation System delays. In December 2015, 32.77 percent of late flights were delayed by weather, up slightly from 32.31 percent in December 2014 and from 30.45 percent in November 2015.

Detailed information on flight delays and their causes is available from [BTS](#).

Mishandled Baggage

The U.S. carriers reporting mishandled baggage data posted a mishandled baggage rate of 4.04 reports per 1,000 passengers in December, down from December 2014's rate of 4.26, but up from November 2015's rate of 2.58. For all of last year, the carriers posted a mishandled baggage rate of 3.24 per 1,000 passengers, down from 2014's rate of 3.61.

Bumping

The report also includes reports of involuntary denied boarding, or bumping, for the fourth quarter of 2015 and calendar year 2015 from U.S. carriers who also report flight delay information. These carriers posted a bumping rate of 0.72 per 10,000 passengers for the quarter, up from the 0.56 rate for the fourth quarter of 2014. The carriers posted a bumping rate of 0.76 per 10,000 passengers last year, an improvement over the 0.92 rate posted in 2014.

Incidents Involving Animals

In December, carriers reported four incidents involving the death, injury, or loss of animals while traveling by air, down from the six reports filed in November 2015. December's incidents involved the deaths of three animals and injury to one other animal. For all of last year, carriers reported 35 animal deaths, injuries to 25 other animals, and three lost animals, for a total of 63 incidents, up from the 45 total incident reports filed for calendar year 2014.

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 81 disability-related complaints in December, up from the 67 complaints received in December 2014, but down from the 96 complaints received in November 2015. For all of last year, the Department received 939 disability complaints, up 19.8 percent from the total of 784 received in 2014.

Complaints About Discrimination

In December, the Department received five complaints alleging discrimination by airlines due to factors other than disability – such as race, religion, national origin, or sex – equal to the total of five recorded in December 2014, but down from the six recorded in November 2015. For all of last year, the Department received 65 discrimination complaints, down 4.4 percent from the total of 68 filed in 2014.

Consumers may file air travel service complaints on the web at www.transportation.gov/airconsumer or by voice mail at (202) 366-2220 or by TTY at (202) 366-0511. They may also mail a complaint to the Aviation Consumer Protection Division, U.S. Department of Transportation, C-75, W96-432, 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE, Washington, DC 20590.

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 website at <http://www.transportation.gov/airconsumer/air-travel-consumer-reports>.

Facts

KEY DECEMBER 2015 ON-TIME PERFORMANCE AND FLIGHT CANCELLATION STATISTICS

Based on Data Filed with the Bureau of Transportation Statistics by the 13 Reporting Carriers and
Tarmac Data Filed by All Carriers

Overall

77.8 percent on-time arrivals

Highest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. Hawaiian Airlines – 93.0 percent
2. Alaska Airlines – 85.3 percent
3. Delta Air Lines – 83.6 percent

Lowest On-Time Arrival Rates

1. Spirit Airlines – 68.7 percent
2. jetBlue Airways – 70.1 percent
3. Virgin America – 71.1 percent

Domestic Flights with Longest Tarmac Delays Exceeding Three Hours

1. Shuttle America flight 3556 from Washington Reagan National to Houston Bush, 12/27/15 – delayed 269 minutes on the tarmac in New Orleans after being diverted
2. American Airlines flight 126 from Los Angeles to Chicago O’Hare, 12/28/15 – delayed 248 minutes on the tarmac at Chicago O’Hare
3. Mesa Airlines flight 5090 from Pittsburgh to Houston Bush, 12/27/15 – delayed 222 minutes on the tarmac in New Orleans after being diverted
4. American Airlines flight 1398 from Las Vegas to Dallas-Fort Worth, 12/26/15 – delayed 204 minutes on the tarmac in Austin after being diverted
5. Mesa Airlines flight 5853 from Memphis to Dallas-Fort Worth, 12/26/15 – delayed 202 minutes on the tarmac in Austin after being diverted

International Flights with Longest Tarmac Delays Exceeding Four Hours

1. Avianca flight 86 from Bogotá, Colombia to Los Angeles, 12/9/15 – delayed 322 minutes on the tarmac in Ontario, Calif. after being diverted
2. Aeroméxico flight 648 from Mexico City to Los Angeles, 12/9/15 – delayed 278 minutes on the tarmac in Ontario, Calif. after being diverted
3. United Airlines flight 1516 from Liberia, Costa Rica to Houston Bush, 12/27/15 – delayed 248 minutes on the tarmac in San Antonio after being diverted

Highest Rates of Canceled Flights

1. Envoy Air – 3.8 percent
2. ExpressJet Airlines – 3.4 percent
3. SkyWest Airlines – 2.9 percent

Lowest Rates of Canceled Flights

1. Hawaiian Airlines – 0.1 percent
2. Delta Air Lines – 0.3 percent
3. JetBlue Airways – 0.3 percent

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