

Airports call for data-driven approach to establishing the post-COVID aviation landscape

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Brussels, 17 June 2020: ACI EUROPE has today responded to IATA's premature call to extend the current waiver from the 80-20 use-it-or-lose-it rule for airport slots into the winter season, warning of potential negative consequences on air connectivity and economic recovery.

Airlines claim they need the airport slot waiver to be extended into the winter season so as to get additional operational flexibility to plan their schedules in the recovery. But that additional operational flexibility comes at a high cost to airports as it allows airlines to declare full schedules, hold on to the requested slots and cancel their flights close to their date of operation – thus leaving airports with the operational costs involved and no revenues to cover them. Crucially, by preventing reallocation to other airlines, the continued late hand-back of unused slots will impact competition and slow down the restoration of air connectivity. This means that extending the waiver for the winter season also risks coming at a high cost to the travelling public and the economy.

For these reasons, whether or not the current airport slot waiver should be extended to the winter season needs to be considered carefully and in due time.

Olivier Jankovec, Director General of ACI EUROPE said: *"There is no need to rush with a decision on this just now. The winter season is still more than 4 months away, with considerable uncertainty about the pace and shape of the recovery in demand for air transport. We urge the European Commission to follow a data-driven and evidenced-based approach to assess whether extending the waiver beyond the end of October will be the most appropriate measure to support the restoration of air connectivity. This means it will also need to consider the impact on consumers and communities - as well as the economic viability of the entire air transport eco-system, including airports."*

ACI EUROPE recalls that the EU Regulation which granted the current waiver requires the Commission to decide on any extension on the basis of EUROCONTROL's traffic projections and scientific data on whether any persistent downturn in air traffic is caused by the pandemic.

Furthermore, ACI EUROPE also notes that a number of airports are reporting that airlines plan to operate full programmes for the winter season - with their request for slots even exceeding those made last year for the same period. This indicates that airlines' assumptions as regards activity levels are not aligned - indeed are at odds, with their request for an extension of the airport slot waiver. There is a danger here that airlines use the airport slot allocation system and the flexibility afforded by the waiver to ensure airport slots cannot be reallocated and keep competition at bay.

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ACI EUROPE calls upon the European Commission and EU States to abide by the following principles when considering airport slot waivers, for the benefit of all stakeholders and in order to avoid abuses:

- A data-driven and evidence-based approach is imperative.
- If a waiver is deemed relevant when based on data - whether full or partial - strict conditions should be attached to avoid unintended impacts on the competitive landscape and ensure that consumers are protected from last-minute cancellations.
- Slots allocated in response to new requests should not be eligible to qualify for the waiver. This is necessary to avoid the possibility of airlines building up rights for the post-COVID-19 future without necessarily using all newly-allocated slots, which would block access to others who may be able to operate sooner.
- Slots must not be covered by waivers when an airline publicly announces that it will cease or importantly reduce its services at an airport. Airlines that are ready and able to operate to support the recovery must not be blocked from entering airports by airlines having confirmed they will exit these markets but continuing to hold slots.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

- **OFF THE GROUND - Market Access - Slot Returns** - [link](#)
- **OFF THE GROUND - Market Access - Handling of Airline Slots in case of Bankruptcy** - [link](#)

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*ACI EUROPE is the European region of Airports Council International (ACI), the only worldwide professional association of airport operators. ACI EUROPE represents over **500 airports** in 45 European countries. Our members facilitate over 90% of commercial air traffic in Europe: **2.5 billion passengers, 20.7 million tonnes of freight** and **25.7 million aircraft movements** in 2019. In response to the Climate Emergency, in June 2019 our members committed to achieve **Net Zero** carbon emissions for operations under their control **by 2050**, without offsetting.*