



Operational Readiness and Airport Transfer (ORAT) – Best Practices

Introduction

Opening an airport facility requires methodical preparation and the participation of experts to ensure that it functions as designed from day one. This is particularly critical for airlines, as a failed or delayed opening can lead to significant disruption, reputational damage, and financial losses.

An ORAT program is an effective process to support the successful introduction of new airport infrastructure. An ORAT program engages airlines and other airport users early to scope requirements, plan and conduct preparation activities, and monitor progress.

The methodology can be applied to make a wide range of facilities – from baggage systems and passenger terminals to entire airports – fully operational.

Implementing ORAT requires close collaboration between a dedicated team and airport end-users, plus a significant investment in time and resources. An ORAT program should therefore be integrated into the larger project plan and safeguarded from delays in construction and commissioning.

ORAT Activities

An ORAT project is overseen by a team of experienced subject matter experts who work directly with airport stakeholders to assess performance, coordinate actions and overcome obstacles.

Principle activities emphasize systems, people, and processes, and include:

- Establishing a governance framework that gains the involvement and commitment of all users.
- Consulting with airlines and others to identify requirements and define operational concepts that incorporate the users' mode of operations.

- Integrating new and existing systems.
- Collaborating with users to develop or refine Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Irregular Operating Procedures (IOPs).
- Conducting orientation and familiarization training that covers not only common facility spaces, functions and systems, but also individual user requirements.
- Performing operational trials that test the functionality of systems and procedures under real life scenarios, both individually and as part of an end-to-end process.
- Ensuring that maintenance practices for new infrastructure are operationally validated.
- Identifying and resolving deficiencies before they become a problem.
- Developing a relocation plan with airlines that balances preferences with the efficient use of airport infrastructure.
- Closing out issues and providing post-opening support to ensure a smooth transition to the new facilities.

Airline participation in ORAT

It is important that the airline perspective be considered at every stage of ORAT. Airports that solely focus on engineering and construction increase the risk of an opening failure. Airlines themselves have a critical role to play in ORAT but must understand the process and be prepared to commit the required resources to support it.

There should be regular and ongoing consultation between the airport and airlines early in the project and prior to any activation phase. Early engagement will help ensure that the new facility is designed to meet airlines' operational requirements and incorporates any planned new technologies.



The ORAT Steering Committee, the senior management and decision-making body, should include airline members. Airline representatives should also participate in an airport ORAT working group whose purpose is to identify and plan relevant activities, track progress, coordinate tasks and address issues.

Early consultation with airlines should confirm that project plans are robust and include:

- Adequate time planned for ORAT.
- An integrated ORAT schedule that includes key interdependencies and milestones.
- Properly phased construction works that maintain operational resilience.
- A comprehensive airline-user ORAT workstream including a comprehensive list of actions that must be completed for opening.

As the ORAT program progresses, airline representatives will be asked to participate in focus groups or sub-groups that concentrate on specific aspects of the process - such as development of operating procedures, and the conduct of infrastructure trials, as well as staff familiarization and training.

Airline personnel will also be expected to take part in carefully scripted operational trials that are a key feature of ORAT. The purpose is not only to verify the functionality of systems and processes, but also to give users the opportunity to gain confidence in the new facilities, systems, and procedures.

For airlines, ORAT is not just a means to guarantee a seamless transition to a new facility, but also an opportunity to improve their own airport procedures, systems and skills. IATA therefore recommends that airlines fully commit to the process by making required staff and resources available for the above activities.

Airline Relocations

ORAT is the process of transitioning a new or redeveloped airport facility from construction to operation. It often impacts airline operations and can result in the need for airline relocations.

An airline relocation policy should be consulted upon and agreed between the airport and the airline community. The outcome should be a common set of rules for reviewing airline occupancy options in a fair and transparent manner, taking into consideration some of the business-related issues that are likely to arise in an airline relocation.

Occupancy scenarios, based on a detailed capacity and demand analysis at the sub-system level (e.g., check-in, bag drop, gates, etc.) should be developed. These scenarios should balance individual airline preferences with the most efficient use of airport infrastructure, maximizing asset utilization and flexibility.

The following rules and criteria should be considered as a starting point, noting there may be others on a case-by-case or local basis.

- An essential principle is not to rely on forced airline relocations. Efforts should be made to work towards consensus at all times.
- Avoid split operations. Co-locate airline facilities, including alliance and other partners, to support efficient airline operations and ensure the best use of airport infrastructure.
- Anticipate future requirements including growth and evolving airline needs.
- Where airlines are requested to move, and would not otherwise do so, the airport should provide funding to support the move.
- Minimize or eliminate operational disruptions during airline relocations through a carefully phased airline move sequence.
- To the greatest extent possible, maintain agreed service levels throughout the transition period.
- Consider other important elements that add time and complexity to moves – changes to operational systems and processes, staff familiarization with new facilities, and communication with stakeholders.

Supporting Documents

- IATA Airport Development Reference Manual 12th edition.