

Worldwide Airport Slot Board

Best practices for Northern Summer 2020 slot returns

The Aviation Industry community is facing an unprecedented challenge as a result of travel restrictions introduced globally in response to the COVID-19 crisis and the sudden drop in passenger demand. Airlines are adjusting their schedules and airports are adjusting their capacity in order to meet these requirements and minimize the economic impact of the reduced demand. Slot usage requirement waivers have been granted for the Northern Summer season at all slot coordinated airports globally, providing relief from the use-it or lose-it rule according to applicable regulations. The WASB is now asking airlines to use this flexibility responsibly to manage their slot portfolios and schedules in a fair, reasonable and appropriate manner.

In the interest of the entire air transport industry, airlines are requested to provide timely schedule updates to ensure that all stakeholders are enabled to make decisions using the most relevant and current data. Airport operators and their service providers rely on accurate airline schedule data to inform their own planning process and level of resources during this crisis and the eventual recovery period that will follow.

The newly created Worldwide Airport Slot Board (WASB), comprising airports, airlines and coordinators representing the global slot community and world regions, is requesting airlines to return any slots no longer required as soon as practically possible, allowing coordinators the possibility to reallocate them and airports the opportunity to adjust their resources based on actual demand. The importance of this cannot be underestimated as we move towards the recovery period, and therefore we ask airlines, airports and coordinators to consider the following:

1. Airlines

WASB asks airlines to provide timely schedule updates by:

- Following the recommendations of the Worldwide Slot Guidelines (WSG) ed.10 [Article 7.5.1 and 8.5.2](#)
- Not retaining, but returning slots not intended for use as early as possible and as soon as such decisions are made and inform their schedule changes to their industry stakeholders.
- Following the guidelines of the WSG ed. 10 [Article 8.14](#) for immediate return of slots in case of ceasing operations at an airport.
- Including an SI message in SCR cancellations identifying COVID-19 as the cause, and request confirmation of 80:20 alleviation. For example:
 - SI COVID-19 CANCELLATION REQUEST. PLEASE PROVIDE AND CONFIRM 80:20 ALLEVIATION IN ACCORDANCE WITH WSG ED.10,
 - SI CHAPTER 8.8 JUSTIFIED NON-UTILIZATION OF SLOTS.
- Ensuring SMA messages are sent in a timely fashion to the relevant facilitator or data collection agent in order to ensure that they hold the most current schedules.

In the context of the COVID-19 outbreak, airlines should endeavour to cancel slots as soon as the corresponding flights are cancelled to enable stakeholders in the entire aviation ecosystem to adjust their resources. Achieving a balanced operational and economic outcome will benefit of the entire industry.

2. Airports

Airlines need to be informed about available capacity in a timely manner to support their ability to manage changes within their schedules and plans. Airports must be aware that changes of capacity decided after the initial publication of coordination parameters, although usually unavoidable in the current context, may significantly influence how airlines plan their schedules. It is therefore essential that airports consult with airlines and coordination committees before implementing any changes to capacity for short- or long-term periods.

Airport operators and their service providers are also under a lot of pressure in these difficult circumstances. They must optimize their resources and align capacity as closely as possible with

airline demand as providing more capacity than needed would be economically and environmentally unjustifiable.

The WASB asks airports to:

- Provide accurate and timely updates on capacity availability and hours of operation.
- Indicate their timeframes for bringing closed and reduced capacity back online in the future with their airline partners.

Airports should follow the guidelines of the WSG ed.10 [Art 6.9.2](#), and [Art 6.10](#) to ensure appropriate communication between the stakeholders.

3. Coordinators, schedules facilitators and data collection agents

The flight schedule data collected by airport coordinators and schedules facilitators are broadly being distributed to other Industry Partners such as Airport managing bodies, Air Navigation Service Providers or Handling Agents that rely on them to plan their own resources and staff in order to supply their services to the airlines.

In the present context of the COVID-19 outbreak it is essential that coordinators conduct detailed monitoring of the accuracy of the flight schedules provided by airlines and on the actual usage of the slots allocated, or schedules agreed. This monitoring process should record the date slots are returned.

Where necessary, the coordinator or schedules facilitator should contact the airlines if unused slots are not being returned in a timely manner. If an airline continues to hold onto unused slots, the coordinator, when necessary, should contact the airport managing body and coordination committee to engage in a dialogue with the concerned airline.

When the coordinator or schedule facilitator have doubt that the slots allocated will be used, they should contact the airline for clarification of their intentions.

Coordinators should follow the guidelines of WSG ed. 10 Art. 9 (Slot monitoring) and in particular [Art 9.1.5](#) and [Art 9.2.J](#)

Why is this important?

The air transport industry is providing much needed support globally to fight the virus outbreak, despite itself being decimated by it – air transport is able to provide repatriation flights to the passengers trying to return home, move medical equipment and supplies desperately needed in the affected countries and ensure the supply chains continue to be mobilized. In this context, close collaboration between airports, airlines and slot coordinators is necessary to maximise benefits for communities.

Accurate and timely slot returns, and schedule change updates allow coordinators globally to reallocate the capacity to other airlines where possible. It also enables airport operators to make data-driven decisions with regards to the operational capacity that is made available, both for passenger flights and flights supporting the response against COVID-19.

It is also important to prepare for the eventual return of consumer demand and passenger flights. During the initial phases of the recovery period, airlines may be required to make ad-hoc schedule adjustments to align with the capacity available. This will rely both on capacity provided by slot returns and close collaboration with airports to ensure capacity is closely aligned with the level of demand.

There is need for understanding and flexibility by airlines, airports and slot coordinators whilst everyone adjusts to this new pace of change and uncertainty – albeit in many situations with less people to do the work.

There is a need for understanding across the community to collaborate and support in order to work towards recovery and establishing a thriving air transport industry again.