



Operational Readiness and Airport Transfer

Introduction

Opening an airport facility is a complex endeavour that requires methodical preparation and the involvement of experts to make sure 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 and losses.

An Operational Readiness and Airport Transfer (ORAT) program is an effective process to support the successful introduction of new airport infrastructure. An ORAT program engages airlines 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 and 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 track 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 on their requirements in order to define operational concepts that incorporate the airlines' 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 familiarisation training that covers not only generic 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 new infrastructure maintenance practices are operationally validated.
 - Identifying and resolving deficiencies before they become a problem.
 - Developing a relocation plan with airlines that balances their preferences with the need for efficient use of airport infrastructure
 - Closing out issues and provide post-opening support to ensure a smooth transition to the new facilities.

Airline participation in ORAT

It is important that the airline perspective be taken into account at every stage of ORAT. Airports that solely focus on construction and engineering 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 while incorporating any planned new technologies.

The ORAT Steering Committee is the senior management and decision-making body and should include airline members. Airline subject matter experts should also participate in an airport ORAT Working Group formed with the objective to identify and plan relevant activities, track progress, coordinate tasks and address issues.

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

- Adequate time planned for ORAT and the implementation of an integrated ORAT Schedule that includes key interfaces and main stakeholders' milestones
- Properly phased construction works to maintain operational resilience.
- A comprehensive ORAT airline user's work stream that includes all critical elements including any potential airline relocation policy.

As the ORAT program progresses, airline subject matter experts 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, infrastructure trials, and familiarization and training.

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

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.

A New Airport Checklist – one of the IATA Airport Development Reference Manual support documents – is another useful tool to conduct onsite reviews of new facilities. It contains a comprehensive list of the critical items that must be completed for a successful opening and helps highlight whether assets and procedures are ready for use or if there are deficiencies to address.

Airline Relocations

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

An airline relocations 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 and take 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 airline preferences with the efficient use of airport infrastructure and maximization of the 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 to avoid forced airline relocations. Efforts should be made to work towards consensus at all times.
- Split operations should be avoided. Co-location of airline operations / Alliances / partnerships support efficient airline operations and ensures the best use of airport infrastructure.
- Consider the need for airline users to grow – check that there are sufficient facilities and infrastructure for anticipated future needs.
- Where airlines are requested to move, and would not otherwise do so, the airport should provide funding on a like-for-like basis.
- Minimise or eliminate operational disruptions during airline relocations through a carefully phased airline move sequence.
- Agreed service levels should be maintained to the greatest extent possible throughout the transition period.
- Take into account other important elements that add time and complexity to moves such as changes to airline and airport operational processes and I.T., familiarisation of new facilities, and airport and customers communications.

Supporting Documents

IATA has reference materials that provide airlines and other stakeholders with further guidance on ORAT.

- IATA Airport Development Reference Manual 11th edition – Section 3.11
- IATA New Airport Checklist.