Airport Slots

Fact Sheet

Overview

Airport slots are a proven mechanism for managing capacity at airports where infrastructure cannot meet demand. Pre-assigned arrival and departure slots are required to ensure efficient operations and the optimal use of capacity, helping to prevent congestion and operational disruption.

Slot allocation should be carried out by an independent slot coordinator in a neutral, transparent, and non-discriminatory manner. This provides airlines with the certainty needed to plan reliable schedules, and allows consumers to benefit from choice, connectivity, and access to destinations, in a predictable way.

Airport capacity constraints continue to grow worldwide. In 2026, 395 airports are subject to airport coordination, including 216 fully slot coordinated airports. Today, around 43% of passengers globally depart from a slot coordinated airport.

Worldwide Airport Slot Guidelines (WASG)

While airlines continue to call for more airport capacity to meet growing demand, infrastructure expansion is unlikely to keep pace with demand. Making the best use of available capacity is critical and requires industry cooperation between airlines, airports, and slot coordinators.

The Worldwide Airport Slot Guidelines (WASG) are jointly developed by airlines, airports, and slot coordinators. The WASG provides a global framework for allocating and managing slots each season. For the full benefits of airport coordination to be realized, the WASG must be applied consistently and in full at congested airports.

The WASG is designed to deliver the following key objectives, as agreed by all three stakeholder groups:

1. To facilitate consumer choice of air services, improve global connectivity, and enhance competition at congested airports for passengers and cargo.
2. To provide consumers with convenient schedules that meet demand, are consistent from one season to the next, and are reliable in terms of their operability.
3. To ensure that slots are allocated at congested airports in an open, fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory manner by a slot coordinator acting independently.
4. To realize the full capacity potential of the airport infrastructure and to promote regular reviews of such capacity and demand that enable effectual capacity declarations for slot allocation on a seasonal basis.
5. To balance airport access opportunities for existing and new airlines.
6. To provide flexibility for industry to respond to regulatory and changing market conditions, as well as changing consumer demand.
7. To minimize congestion and delays.

The decision to implement airport coordination should rest with the responsible regulatory authority, based on thorough demand and capacity analysis and consultation with airlines and other stakeholders.

For more information on the WASG and slots, visit www.iata.org/slots.

Slot Coordination and the WASG

- **The WASG cannot create new capacity.** The WASG can only make best use of available capacity. Airports need to do more to enhance the operational capacity of existing facilities, and governments should encourage timely and cost-effective airport and airspace expansion.
- **Accurate and timely demand and capacity analysis is essential.** At many airports, capacity declarations are not reviewed frequently enough, potentially leaving available capacity unused. Regular review and timely communication of capacity changes are critical to minimizing disruption and aligning schedules with demand.
- **Aviation is a global industry requiring a global approach to slots.** Flights operate between two airports, and airline networks often include hundreds of flights. A single, harmonized approach to slot coordination is essential. The WASG provides this framework with the passenger and cargo customers at its core.
- **The WASG is the industry standard.** The WASG is jointly published by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), Airports Council International (ACI), and the Worldwide Airport Coordinators Group (WWACG). It reflects sustained collaboration between airlines, airports, and coordinators to modernize and improve slot coordination practices.
- **The WASG performs well at congested airports.** The WASG performs effectively at congested airports, delivering benefits wherever demand exceeds available capacity. This includes even the most highly constrained airports. For example, London Heathrow regularly operates with capacity utilization at around 99% of its declared capacity under the WASG framework.
- **Consumers benefit from the WASG.** The WASG enables airlines to offer broad route networks, choice of destinations, and competitive pricing, while maintaining reliable schedules. Schedule certainty is particularly critical for business travel and continues to support trade, economic growth, and social connectivity.
- **Fair and consistent treatment is achieved.** The WASG is intentionally designed to be flexible, allowing it to be applied across all markets while ensuring equal treatment of all airline business models. Its separation from political interests, traffic rights, and bilateral considerations removes the need for negotiation. All airline slot requests are therefore treated on an equal footing, in a transparent, neutral, and non-discriminatory manner.
- **Slot Monitoring ensures every slot counts.** The WASG slot monitoring process ensures the efficient use of scarce airport capacity by assessing whether slots are operated as allocated, ensuring airlines only retain the slots they intend to use and to return unused slots for reallocation.
- **The WASG is fit for purpose and remains the most effective long-term framework for managing scarce airport capacity.** While the industry remains open to alternative approaches, research shows that mechanisms such as auctions, peak pricing, or purely algorithmic allocation introduce cost, complexity, and schedule uncertainty without delivering better outcomes. Through a simple, fair, and neutral process, the WASG supports competition, growth, and access at increasingly congested airports, enabling new entrants to compete alongside incumbents. This is balanced with the need for stability and schedule certainty, which underpins route development, connectivity, and the wider economic and social benefits of aviation.