

Managing temporary reductions of airport capacity

WASB best practice paper

Introduction

Competent Authorities may introduce measures that temporarily reduce the available capacity of airports (e.g. as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic). This paper provides guidance to manage temporary reductions of airport capacity announced after the confirmation of seasonal capacity parameters. All guidance is complementary to the Worldwide Airport Slot Guidelines.

Principles of temporary airport capacity reductions

1. The Competent Authority will explain the rationale for the revised airport capacity parameters and provide them to the Coordinator as soon as practical after having consulted with the Coordination Committee or equivalent body.
2. In the consultation with the Coordination Committee or equivalent body, the Competent Authority will advise the period impacted. If a Coordination Committee or equivalent body does not currently exist, it should be created to encourage open communication between all relevant stakeholders.
3. All stakeholders are encouraged to consider the use of innovative solutions or technologies to limit the need for temporary capacity reductions when possible.
4. Any mandatory schedule reductions must be spread across all affected airlines that utilise the affected infrastructure, in a fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory manner by a slot coordinator acting independently.

Coordinator

5. If advance notice regarding an upcoming temporary airport capacity reduction is received, the Coordinator will immediately put in place measures to prevent new slot requests from being processed until the revised capacity parameters are received. Online portals, if they are used, may be temporarily disabled or message filters used to prevent Slot Clearance Requests (SCR) from being automatically processed. The use of online portals is encouraged to increase transparency for all stakeholders.
6. The Coordinator will give an indication of the required reductions by carrier as soon as possible after the revised capacity parameters are received. The reference date used for the schedule reduction will depend on the timing of the temporary reduction of airport capacity:
 - a) If the revised capacity parameters are received after the Historic Baseline Date (HBD), schedule reductions will be based on slot allocations held seven days after the revised capacity parameters are published;
 - b) If the revised capacity parameters are received after the publication of the seasonal capacity parameters but before or at the Historic Baseline Date (HBD), schedule reductions will be based on slot allocations held at the Historic Baseline Date (HBD).

7. The required schedule reductions will be measured based on a defined time period where congestion occurs and/or as a total per day, providing that a fair distribution of cancellations across carriers is ensured.
8. The required schedule reduction will also consider as a reference the percentage share held by a carrier at the Slot Allocated Listing (SAL). For example, if carrier A held 70% of capacity in the 0900 hour at initial coordination then they should hold 70% of the reduced capacity in the same hour after the capacity reduction, whenever feasible. When slots are allocated for a specific terminal, the reduction may only apply to carriers operating in the said terminal if relocation is not possible.
9. The Coordinator will aim to satisfy as much demand as possible based on the revised capacity parameters and treat all types of service equally. In this regard, the Coordinator should explore proactively any viable solution to avoid schedule reductions by means of proposing minor schedule adjustments to the airlines.
10. The Coordinator may consider consultations with the Coordination Committee or equivalent body if further guidance regarding the reallocation of capacity is required. For example, applying a strict percentage may not be possible if a carrier only holds one pair of slots per day.
11. All carriers will be given an opportunity to retime flights if so required. The Coordinator will advise a date that retime requests should be submitted. After this date, the Coordinator will process the requests to ensure a fair distribution across carriers. After this process has been completed, all subsequent changes will be processed on a first come, first served basis.
12. Any increase in available capacity should be allocated fairly across all carriers impacted by reductions. Priority should be given to those impacted by the greatest proportional reductions as a result of their limited operations at the impacted airport.
13. For the purpose of transparency, the Coordinator will publish on its website:
 - a) The temporary capacity parameters, including supporting analysis.
 - b) The total number of slots/seats that need to be cancelled
 - c) Details of the required reductions by carrier
 - d) Compliance in adhering to the temporary capacity reduction by carrier

Airline

14. The Airline will decide which flights to cancel or retime into available capacity to meet the reduction in airport capacity. For reductions in passenger throughput limits, the airline may choose to meet the restriction in other ways, for example by capping the aircraft seat capacity instead of cancelling a flight.
15. Cancellations due to the temporary airport capacity reduction should only be sent to the Coordinator after the Historic Baseline Date (HBD) once the final reduction requirements are distributed. Should the temporary capacity reduction be announced post-HBD, carriers should send cancellation messages at the earliest opportunity and as agreed with the Coordination Committee or equivalent body and any applicable regulation.

Airport

16. The Airport Operator will balance capacity with demand and regularly communicate with the Coordination Committee or equivalent body. Where possible, lead times and preparations to open facilities should be shared with relevant stakeholders.

Historic precedence

17. Slots cancelled as a result of temporarily reduced capacity parameters should be treated as justified non-utilization at both ends of the route and considered as operated to ensure fair treatment in respect to the 80:20 use-it or lose-it rule.
18. Alleviation should only be granted to slots returned in advance of the planned operation. Conditions about a minimum level of anticipation required for slot returns might be applicable, subject to local legislation.
19. New slots intended for operation but restricted by the reduction in capacity will be considered as operated, only when the reduction in capacity is advised after the Historic Baseline Date (HBD).
20. New slots allocated after the temporary reduction in airport capacity will initially be allocated on a non-historic basis. If operated in compliance with the 80:20 rule, the coordinator will consider these for historic precedence as per WASG 8.7.1.d. If the slots are deemed eligible for historic precedence, they will be included in the Slot Historic List message (SHL), subject to available capacity.

Slot monitoring

21. Carriers are required to return slots that they do not intend to operate as soon as possible so they can be allocated to other carriers. Late return of slots that are not intended for use may prevent the application of any alleviation of the 80:20 use-it or lose-it rule to the series concerned.
22. The Coordinator will review any failure to operate to the times allocated in line with WASG chapter 9 and any local legislation and/or sanction schemes in place in the relevant jurisdiction.

Level 1 and 2 Airports

23. Mandatory capacity reductions may result in demand being constrained at Level 1 and Level 2 airports. The consistent implementation of equivalent principles to those detailed in this paper should apply. For example:
 - a. Schedules cancelled as a result of temporarily reduced capacity parameters should be treated as operated at both ends of the route to ensure fair treatment in respect to future equivalent season schedule facilitation priorities. Schedules will not be considered as operated if schedules are not operated or cancelled in advance of the planned flight.
24. A temporary change of coordination level could be required if demand exceeds the available capacity as a result of the temporary reduction. These cases should be managed as per WASG 6.7.