era
european regions airline association

ERA guidelines on high quality passenger and aircraft handling

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Introduction
The following guidelines are published by the ERA Directorate and have been developed through consultation and discussion between ERA members (airlines, airports & suppliers).

The guidelines are not designed as rigid rules, but rather a list of suggested topics which airports, handling companies and airlines can, depending on local circumstances , review together with the aim of agreeing if any of the measures may improve the provision, cost effectiveness and quality of services delivered.

Quality, cost and safety considerations
It is not the purpose of these recommendations to define specific quality levels nor to suggest the levels of cost which companies should allocate to achieving improved quality. Where possible the guidelines should be used to help achieve higher quality at lower cost. However, where a guideline has an increased cost implication, the parties concerned should determine if there is a positive cost/benefit through its implementation. In all cases existing safety levels have to be maintained or improved when considering implementation of any of these guidelines.

How to use these guidelines
In many cases the recommendations ask airports, handling agents and airlines to work together to review existing procedures or working arrangements.The recommendations are designed as a guide for discussion between the involved parties, which may need to include security companies, customs & excise and immigration officials.

More information
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Note
Throughout this paper the terms 'regional(s)' and 'mainline' are used. These terms refer to the type of aircraft rather than a particular type of operator. A regional operator implies an airline which includes smaller aircraft types in its fleet (typically 100 seats or fewer and/or a main door sill height of under 2 metres); a mainline operator implies an airline only using larger aircraft types (typically more than 100 seats).

1 PASSENGER PERCEPTION AND EXPERIENCE

High quality passenger perception and experience whilst moving through the terminal building are key requirements for regional airlines. The passenger 'airport experience' can be improved by a range of measures including the provision of dedicated facilities for regional aircraft users.

Recommendation 1

Airlines, airports and handling companies should work together to establish enhanced passenger processing facilities for regional passengers. Examples include:

- Dedicated check-in desks/areas.
- Self check-in facilities.
- Fast track security lanes.
- Provision of services such as wireless networks (LAN), internet points or fax facilities.
- Increased access to executive lounges and/or dedicated 'quiet' lounge areas.
- Segregated gates and boarding processes for regional airlines.
- The setting of specific minimum/latest check-in times.
- Rapid delivery of checked baggage after disembarkation.
- 'Bag at gate' service on all regional aircraft flights, security measures permitting and re-examined if not.

2 PASSENGER AND BAGGAGE TRANSFER

A key aspect of delivering high quality passenger service on a regional service involves the transfer of passengers from the aircraft to the terminal. The following items apply to aircraft parked either at a stand connected by an air bridge to a terminal or at a remote stand.

2.1 Use of stands directly linked to a main terminal

Ideally regional operators should have full access to stands close to the main terminal and where requested by an operator served by an air bridge or pier. If this is not possible, or an operator chooses to use a remote stand, efforts should be made to ensure that the levels of passenger and baggage processing quality are equal to those received when parked on an air bridge served stand. Items 2.2 – 2.4 are particular measures which can be considered when remotely parked.

2.2 Passenger transfers between terminal and aircraft

When stands are used without air bridges, passengers will need to walk either from a bus or the terminal to the aircraft. Airlines, airports and handling companies could examine ways of ensuring that passengers are limited in their exposure to the weather and ramp environment (eg rain, wind, heat, cold, noise). This requirement is particularly important in extreme climates. Technical solutions, such as covered walkways or shelter roofs, could be used to achieve this. Alternatively, procedural processes, such as parking the bus closer to the aircraft and allowing passengers to remain on the bus until there is no queue to board the aircraft, are other solutions. Several solutions are likely to be possible and different requirements by airlines and airports will determine the level of solution required.

2.3 Apron transfers

'Aircraft to aircraft' or apron transfers involve the direct transfer of connecting passengers between aircraft without the need to transit via a terminal building. The use of these transfers can be by car, bus or on foot. Apron transfers can be particularly effective for passengers arriving and/or departing from a remote parking area. Apron transfers are recommended for connecting passengers arriving and/or departing from a remote stand with not fewer than 10mins and not more than 25mins actual connection time.

Note: transfers of this type can only be achieved where the airport layout is suitable and the local security regulations permit such action. At any location where the only barrier to achieving apron transfers is the security policy, the airport concerned is encouraged to examine whether that policy needs to apply in the particular circumstances.

2.4 Transfer information

Transfer passengers should be provided with transfer information as soon as possible. For passengers arriving on remote stands consideration should be given to providing monitors on transfer buses to provide advanced information to passengers.

2.5 Baggage processing for connecting passengers

When aircraft are parked remotely or on a close-in stand, airlines and handling agents should ensure that pre-sorting of hold baggage prior to loading is undertaken so as to allow fast removal of connecting checked luggage on arrival.

Recommendation 2

Airlines, airports and handling companies should work together to achieve the following.

- Allow regional operators to make full use of stands close to the main terminal and when requested by an operator, served by an air bridge or pier
- Reduce transfer times for remotely parked operations. Issues such as the location of the remote stand in relation to the terminal, the location of baggage processing facilities, the bus route to the terminal and the drop-off point at the terminal should all be examined.
- Examine the need for, and consequently the solutions available to limit passenger exposure to the weather and ramp environment when using remote stands; eg covered walkways or shelter roofs
- Make use of, where possible, apron transfers for connecting passengers (including their baggage) arriving and/or departing from remote parking positions with not fewer than 10mins and not more than 25mins actual connection time.
- Ensure that connecting hold luggage is loaded appropriately to ensure fast removal on arrival allowing prompt processing for the onward connection.
- Consider providing transfer information monitors on buses used to transfer passengers from aircraft to terminal.

3 USE OF AIR BRIDGES (PIERS) BY LOW SILL HEIGHT AIRCRAFT

Most conventional air bridges are not able to accommodate aircraft with sill heights under 2 metres. This limitation excludes many regional aircraft types from using air bridges. The result is remote parking stands being allocated to regional aircraft, often providing an inferior service to passengers.

Recommendation 3

There are technical solutions available which allow air bridges to be adapted to allow use by low sill aircraft. Airports should investigate what possibilities exist in an effort to allow regional aircraft to park on conventional stands and make use of air bridges. For example airports can give consideration to the use of mobile aircraft stairs linked to an air bridge to enable passengers to walk from apron level to arrivals/departures level without the need to use transfer buses.

4 ENSURING THE BEST USE OF EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE FOR REGIONAL AND LARGER AIRCRAFT

At some airports which handle both regional and mainline aircraft there is limited shared infrastructure (eg parking stands) for the handling of regional and mainline aircraft. Airports should work to ensure that they are making the best use of the existing infrastructure to meet the needs of all operators. Airports should also look at ways of using technical

solutions to enable better sharing of infrastructure (eg the parking of multiple regional aircraft in a single large dedicated area close to the terminal).

Recommendation 4
Airports should review their policy on infrastructure use to ensure maximum sharing of facilities by mainline and regional aircraft or consider the introduction of additional infrastructure for regionals. In particular, regional aircraft should be able, upon request, to have access to all appropriate infrastructure facilities made available to mainline aircraft.

5 MINIMUM CONNECTING TIMES (MCT)
Closer cooperation between airport operators and airlines may allow shorter MCTs for regional aircraft operators. The MCT may be for connecting services between two regional aircraft or from a regional aircraft to a mainline aircraft or vice versa. MCTs should be as short as possible, but must also be realistic to ensure MCTs can be met and must therefore be based on actual time/motion analysis.

Recommendation 5
Airports and airlines should establish and publish the shortest possible MCTs for connections.

6 REDUCTION OF GROUND TIMES
The reduction of ground times during an aircraft turnaround has important commercial considerations. Higher aircraft utilisation has resulted in lower turnaround times for many carriers. Ensuring a smooth and fast turnaround is critical to punctual operations.

Recommendation 6
Airlines, airports and handling companies should examine processes and activities during a typical turnaround to find ways of reducing ground times during short turnarounds. Areas to consider include, but are not limited to, the following.

- The use of power-on and -off procedures rather than pushback. Where possible, stands should be redesigned to allow use of these procedures for regional aircraft. All new stands should be designed to allow power-on and -off.
- Not delaying passenger disembarkation while waiting for 'delivery at aircraft' luggage to be delivered to the aircraft door.
- Reviewing fuelling policy to allow boarding and disembarking whilst fuelling is in progress, without the need to have fire services in attendance.
- Reviewing the need to undertake toilet and water servicing at each turnaround.

7 HANDLING PROCEDURES/SKILLS
Regional aircraft are unique in their handling requirements. Whereas certain skills or resources are needed for handling large aircraft (eg operation of high loaders), regional aircraft require some skills and/or knowledge that are specific to smaller aircraft types (eg driving standards – caution when driving vehicles near regional aircraft because of low wings and the risk of collision). Simple improvements and changes may save costs and improve quality. Where possible new technology should be exploited to assist processes and reduce labour costs.

Recommendation 7
Airports and handling companies should review the training requirements for handlers assigned to regional aircraft in close cooperation with regional airlines. Where necessary, specific training guidelines should be established to improve safety, quality and/or reduce cost.

8 HANDLING CHARGES AND SERVICES

At some airports handling services and charges are "bundled" together resulting in a lack of clarity concerning services received and their associated costs. Regional aircraft have specific requirements for services, equipment and infrastructure. These can vary from the requirements for larger aircraft or different types of operator. Airports/handling agents should be urged to adopt the ICAO principles of simplicity, transparency and non-discrimination which apply to landing and other associated fees.

Recommendation 8

- Airports and handling agents should where possible unbundle handling services so that carriers can pick and choose the services they require.
- Airports and handling agents should examine the way charges are structured to ensure that they are cost related and are linked directly to services offered. Where possible, individual services should be capable of being purchased on a 'menu' basis.

9 IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF NEW SECURITY LEGISLATION

Recent developments related to anti-terrorist security are likely to have an impact on the ability to smoothly and efficiently handle passengers and their baggage. It is important that airlines, airports and handling companies work together to assess the effect of any new regulation on handling quality. Through such an assessment it should be possible to find ways of maintaining high quality handling and meeting expected security standards.

Recommendation 9

Airlines, airports and handling companies should jointly assess the impact of new security requirements on handling quality and customer convenience. Where possible, changes in handling practices should be agreed upon to ensure consistent quality handling and customer convenience, whilst meeting any new security requirements.

10 COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SHARING

Better communication between all parties at an airport can result in smoother, more efficient operations and a higher standard of service received by the passenger. All elements included in the operation of an airport (eg the airport operator, airlines, handling agents, ATC providers and all suppliers of services at the airport) should work at ways of sharing information and improving communication. The use of Collaborative Decision Making (CDM) should be considered as an option.

Recommendation 10

Airport and airlines should work together to find ways of improving communication and information sharing amongst all parties involved in the handling and dispatch of aircraft. In particular airlines should ensure that existing and new airport destinations are fully aware of the business practices, standards and needs of their customers. The use of Collaborative Decision Making (CDM) should be considered as an option.

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