

What is the aviation industry doing about delays and cancellations in flight operations?

The current situation, with increasing delays and flight cancellations as well as long waiting times at security checks, does not live up to the promise of quality or the airline industry's own expectations. But what else are the German airlines and airports, as well as German air traffic control, doing to ensure flight operations run as scheduled? And where can politicians and government agencies make a contribution to solving capacity bottlenecks?

Capacity bottlenecks in European air traffic lead to delays and cancellations

Causes of the current accumulation of irregularities in flight operations



In the first half of 2018, 1.59 million flights were recorded in German airspace. This is significantly more air traffic than in previous years and than forecast. In this context, there are currently an increasing number of flight delays and cancellations in Germany and throughout Europe.

According to Eurocontrol, the average flight delay in June this year was 17.5 minutes, while 6.5 percent of all flights were more than one hour late on arrival.

There are several reasons for the current situation, which reinforce each other:

- Those companies that have acquired parts of Air Berlin are working on integrating aircraft and employees into the new operations. This process is not yet complete. The reason is that necessary capacities are currently lacking.
- Strikes at individual system partners lead to considerable irregularities. Strikes by air traffic controllers in some European countries, for example, result in longer flight routes and therefore delays as well.
- Extreme weather conditions such as thunderstorms and strong winds around or inside approach and departure areas are increasing.
- There are capacity bottlenecks in European airspace, as the member states have not yet succeeded in creating a cross-border Single European Sky.
- Rigid operating-time restrictions at German airports make it difficult to handle air traffic smoothly and to react flexibly to delays.
- There are sometimes long waiting times at the security checkpoints, as the checking procedure in Germany is less efficiently organized than in other European countries.

But what are the companies in the German aviation industry doing to improve the current situation in the short and long term? And what can and should politicians and administrations do to eliminate the capacity bottlenecks in air traffic?

What is the aviation industry doing?

Airlines, airports and German air traffic control have significantly stepped up their efforts to stabilize flight operations:

- **More staff:**
Where necessary and possible, airlines, airports and German air traffic control employ additional staff to relax the situation and ensure that passengers are being looked after.
- **Priority for delayed flights:**
All system partners try to handle time-sensitive and delayed flights with priority where possible and to optimize flight plans and ground processes. This also means that time buffers for unforeseen events are integrated into flight plans in advance.
- **Use of reserve resources:**
Where possible, the airlines use reserve aircraft and stand-by crews to compensate for delays or plan for longer downtimes with sufficient time buffers.
- **Optimized use of airspace:**
Together with its European partners, German air traffic control is working to untangle air traffic hubs and relieve the particularly busy upper airspace – primarily by relocating flights to lower flight levels.

- **Additional checkpoints:**
Where possible, the airports try to improve the check-in situation with additional security checkpoints and additional personnel. However, since the security checks are organized by the state, companies can only provide limited relief.

The companies are currently mobilizing considerable extra funds and personnel for this additional effort.

What can politics do?

In some relevant fields, the hands of aviation-industry companies are tied. Other responsible bodies must take action too, in particular with regard to long-term capacity development:

- **More capacity in airspace:**
The capacity of European airspace must be increased. This requires a stronger initiative by the EU and its member states to overcome the fragmented organization of air traffic control in Europe and the non-uniform integration of civil and military air traffic.
- **More efficient security checks:**
The efficiency in the management of aviation security checks must be improved. To this end, the coalition's declared intent to make processes more efficient and to assume part of the rising costs must be implemented without delay.
- **Faster border controls:**
Waiting times at border controls must be reduced, which requires the provision of additional personnel of the Federal Police.

- **More efficient customs administration:**
The interfaces to government functions, such as customs administration, must be organized more efficiently. This requires increased investment by the federal government in the digitization of management processes.

- **Demand-driven infrastructure:**
It must be ensured that the airport infrastructure can be expanded to meet demand and that the legally approved flexibility in operating hours remains available for handling delayed flights.

Reducing capacity bottlenecks

Eurocontrol, the European Organization for the Safety of Air Navigation, expects air traffic in Europe to increase by 53 percent by 2040. Around 16 million flights will then be handled in the skies over Europe every year.

Eurocontrol points out that the current capacity is not designed for this growth and that around seven times as many flights as today could be significantly delayed in 2040 if air traffic capacity remains unchanged. A massive effort is therefore needed everywhere to avoid this scenario.

The current situation alone shows that air traffic is increasingly reaching its capacity limits. But these limits can be overcome!

To ensure that growth remains possible and capacity bottlenecks can be eliminated, the persistently high demand requires massive efforts on all sides – from companies in the aviation industry, but also from politics and administration.

About the BDL:

The German Aviation Association (BDL) was founded in 2010 as a joint representation of the interests of the German air transport industry. Members of the association are airlines, airports, German air traffic control and aviation service providers. These companies employ more than 180,000 employees. Air transport in Germany enables mobility for more than 200 million passengers a year and contributes to the transport of goods worth more than €200 billion to strengthen Germany as a business location.

Publisher:

German Aviation Association (BDL)
Haus der Luftfahrt, Friedrichstraße 79, D-10117 Berlin
Telephone: +49 30 520077-100, Telefax: +49 30 520077-111

Person responsible:

Matthias von Randow, Executive Director

Collaboration on this issue:

Ivo Rzegotta, Head of Strategic Planning and Communications
Marian Kortas, Head of Operations, Engineering & Safety
Carola Scheffler, Press Spokesperson

As of:

August 2018

Luftfahrt aktuell:

You can subscribe and unsubscribe to this information service on our [website](#). Please send your comments and suggestions to luftfahrt-aktuell@bdl.aero.

