
ACI ADVISORY BULLETIN

Airside Safety and Operations under COVID-19

Montreal, 3 April 2020 – Airports Council International (ACI) World has created this bulletin based on a short survey of the members of the ACI World Safety and Technical Standing Committee.

The survey included questions on the impact on airfield operations of the travel restrictions and reductions in traffic as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

General

Of those that responded to the survey, 44% had experienced a 90% or greater reduction in aircraft movements, and 64% had 70% or greater reduction.

Most airports surveyed have not restricted their hours of operation due to COVID-19, but three-quarters have closed some of their airside infrastructure (runways, taxiways, aprons, stands, piers) – and a slightly higher percentage have special arrangements in place to park grounded aircraft.

Themes

Parking of grounded aircraft

Respondents said requests frequently exceed the number of stands available and have resulted in the following operational actions:

- establishing airport capacity for overflow aircraft parking for the short to medium term, and
- ensuring safety through a risk assessment of available locations for overflow parking.

It was found that parking requirements may be volatile. Airline parking requests may be for under 48 hours, up to a week, for several weeks, and to several months. Some aircraft are being regularly rotated through grounding and in-service, to keep them in good condition.

ACI recommends airports produce a plan with a map of where aircraft should be parked and how to park them to facilitate access. The tower must be fully aware of the plan, and where inbound aircraft will be parked. Some airlines appear also to be making multiple requests regarding parking of the same aircraft which indicates a need to coordinate requests for aircraft parking with other airports that may be used by the base carrier.

One airport mentioned that, due to possibility of strong winds, they prefer nose to tail parking, rather than diagonal, which can save space.

Ongoing access to aircraft by airlines also needs to be facilitated to ensure essential maintenance. Airport operators want to limit access to the maneuvering area for safety reasons, but essential maintenance should be allowed (but not for loading, unloading, cleaning, catering, or cabin servicing and the like). Airports should issue a directive on parking of aircraft to cover this.

ACI World believes planning should be carried out to allow for up to six months before all aircraft return to normal service

Taxiway and runway pavements are not normally designed for parking

Respondents expressed concern about damage to pavements. ACI World urges airports to make an assessment based on aircraft types and pavement rating and to consider how to ensure pavements remain up to standard.

Aircraft operators may seek to add ballast in their stored aircraft to ensure stability under wind conditions, therefore it is anticipated that flexible pavement may suffer from overloading. In case of damage, airports should consider that taxiways requiring repairs or re-surfacing could be out of service for some time, with attendant operational constraints.

Even when there is no damage, airports should give consideration as to how pavements should be re-certified once the aircraft are moved. We are seeking advice from aircraft manufacturers.

Airside Operations Teams

Nearly 80% of the respondents had reduced the number of airside operations staff on duty.

Airports should consider reducing on-site operations and maintenance staff to only those required for safety-critical functions or to those carrying out functions that cannot be done remotely.

Airports should reduce exposure of employees by canceling face-to-face meetings and contacts and replacing these with virtual communication where possible. Contact between operations teams at shift changeover times should also be limited.

Airports should also physically separate the operations team by using a backup operations control centre (if applicable) as well as the main ops centre. This can avoid a whole team being out of operation because one person has become unwell. Operations shift teams should not be mixed; shift rotations should retain the same team members so that one sick person can only affect one team.

Solo working, rather than working in pairs should also be considered. The congregation of staff in break rooms should also be reduced

Document sharing should be reduced with load-sheets left at a specific place in the airbridge, picked up by crew and thus without immediate contact, for example.

Every manager or team leader should have a replacement that does not meet with him/her as a contingency. Airports should have a pool of individuals who are at home but on call in case of need and teleworking should be used where possible.

Keeping social distance between individuals within teams - over two meters of separation from each employee – is important and increased levels of cleaning of work areas and equipment should be introduced, including:

- all desks, phones, radios, vehicles, computers, machines, must be wiped down after use, and
- periodical disinfection of offices and vehicles should be undertaken.

Any member of staff showing signs of a cold or flu must stay home until well and establishing a special medical call centre to evaluate symptoms of employees before coming at work should be considered. Employees should be permitted to use car parking closer to terminals and the work location - that is usually reserved for passengers, for example – thus avoiding the need for staff to be in close proximity on buses.

Cargo operations

Cargo operations have increased at all airports participating in the survey but no specific special arrangements in response to this increase were mentioned.

Freighter capacity cannot be increased and is fully used but an increase in belly cargo is possible with fewer passengers, however, this has been outweighed by the sheer number of passenger flight cancellations. A small number of airlines are operating passenger aircraft just to carry belly cargo.

One airport operator mentioned that cargo-only aircraft were supposed to use only one of their airports pre-COVID-19 and that they had to change their rules to allow cargo-only flights at the main airport. This should be considered at airports with similar arrangements.

Coordination - internally and with key external stakeholders

To limit physical contact between staff, the main communication method with staff and stakeholders is through virtual means, through online platforms, and telephone. There is also a heavy reliance on approved and appropriate email and messaging applications.

To coordinate communications, a central crisis committee - working 24/7 to coordinate with authorities and teams in charge of operations – should be established. Airports reported that high-level decisions are made by an executive committee meeting once-a-day.

Airports should also use the Airport Collaborative Decision Making (A-CDM) coordination structure (where available).

Ends

Twenty-five replies were received on the short survey of the members of the ACI World Safety and Technical Standing Committee in the timeframe 20-30 March 2020.

Airports Council International (ACI), the trade association of the world's airports, was founded in 1991 with the objective of fostering cooperation among its member airports and other partners in world aviation, including the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Air Transport Association and the Civil Air Navigation Services Organization. In representing the best interests of airports during key phases of policy development, ACI makes a significant contribution toward ensuring a global air transport system that is safe, secure, customer-centric and environmentally sustainable. As of January 2020, ACI serves 668 members, operating 1979 airports in 176 countries.