

## **ACI EUROPE short statement on airport congestion for the Sofia Ministerial Session on Congestion**

The 2004 Eurocontrol/ECAC "Challenges to growth" report and SESAR have sent clear warning signals regarding the critical airport capacity situation in Europe and its impact. The 2004 "Challenges to growth" report reveals that:

- despite a 60% potential capacity increase of the airport network, and
- despite a maximum achievable airport capacity scenario, which is based on better use of existing capacity at all airports ("maximised capacity" though systematic implementation of best practices) and assumes the building of all already planned infrastructure developments.

the situation is quickly deteriorating into a capacity imbalance (capacity shortage in parts of the network with remaining capacity surplus in other parts). Although demand will grow even faster at smaller airports compared to larger airports, the capacity crunch will affect mainly the larger airports - where demand exercises stronger pressure. It should be noted that those airports usually coincide with the nodes of the ATM network. Ultimately, in 2025:

- More than 60 airports will be congested and the top 20 airports will be saturated almost all day long.
- 3,7 million flights will be unaccommodated, affecting 260 million passengers.

The European Union is reacting to prepare to this scenario. The Commission Communication on airport capacity, safety and efficiency is a step in the right direction. It includes an action plan comprising a wide range of measures, some of which formalise and reinforce operational links between airport operations and ATM operations which will generate a positive impact on the capacity of the system. It also provides for the first moves towards a process of airport capacity planning at European level through the creation of an observatory on airport capacity involving the Member States and stakeholders.

However, this Communication places most of the emphasis of the optimisation of existing airport capacity and fundamentally fails to acknowledge that this will not be sufficient to address the capacity crunch and that there is a need to build new infrastructure. In that sense, the Communication does not provide a fully adequate response/follow up to the 2004 "Challenges to growth" report. What is at stake is not only the success of the Single European Sky, but also the competitive position of the EU economy.

It is worth noting that this has happened while at the same time, airports have transformed themselves from mere infrastructure providers to fully fledged businesses, generating the resources to finance their own capacity development without State support. European airports have spent in infrastructure development € 7,5 billion annually over the 2000-2005 period, and will spend € 8,1 billion annually over the 2006-2010 period. This represents € 78 billion of capital investment over a 10 year period.

As acknowledged by the 2006 European Commission Mid-term review Transport White Paper, user charges must contribute to the financing of airports which are the most commercially viable parts of Europe's transport networks.

There is an urgent need to develop an active EU strategy based on an integrated and system wide approach for aviation capacity. Failing to invest now for the future to allow sustainable air traffic growth and increased competition in the aviation sector would be damaging for the long term wellbeing of the entire industry and indeed for the European economy overall.

Brussels, May 2007

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*Airports Council International (ACI) is the only worldwide professional association of airport operators. ACI EUROPE represents some 400 airports in 45 European countries. Member airports handle 90% of commercial air traffic in Europe, welcoming over a billion passengers each year.*