

New monthly reports account for flight delays

By Leslie Miller
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Air travelers now can find out which airlines have the most delayed flights due to issues they can control, such as maintenance or crew problems.

The Transportation Department has since 1987 issued monthly reports ranking major airlines according to their on-time records but didn't say why flights were late.

The agency started collecting expanded data five months ago and released its first report Thursday. The latest month surveyed was October, when 3.49 percent, or about 19,000 flights, were delayed by airline problems.

Roughly the same number of flights were delayed by weather. Security — including airport evacuations or delays caused by lines of more than 29 minutes — accounted for less than 1 percent of late flights.

Overall, 86.4 percent of all flights were on schedule in October, the third-best month since the government began keeping records 16 years ago.

"We like what the report says," said Doug Wills, spokesman for the Air Transport Association, which represents airlines. "We think this is a good analytical tool to measure on-time performance."

The report also showed that in October:

— JetBlue had the best on-time performance, with 90.4 percent of its flights arriving on schedule.

— Continental Airlines had the lowest rate of delays, 1.8 percent, caused by circumstances within its control. Atlantic Coast Airlines had the highest percentage — 8.4 percent.

After the summer of 2000, when bad weather and congested skies caused record delays and cancellations, the Transportation Department decided to add a requirement that airlines add more information for consumers about the reason for late flights — including circumstances under the airline's control.

Those include cleaning the airplane, overbooking, maintenance or a medical emergency.

Sam Podberesky, assistant general counsel for the Transportation Department, said 40 percent of consumer complaints are directly related to flight delays.

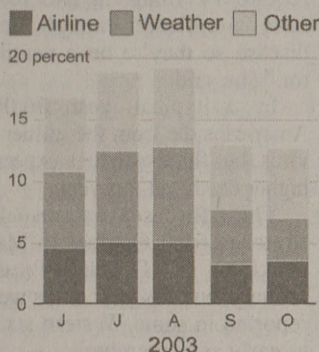
"Most blame the airlines," he said. "The major complaint wasn't that people were lied to — it was that they weren't informed."

The report, which covered June through October, showed that weather is a major cause of delays, either because aircraft can't fly through bad weather or because weather causes problems

Tardy flights

Information on the causes of flight delays has been released by the government for the first time. Operational delays held up the most flights in October.

Reasons for delayed flights, by percentage



NOTE: Other includes late arrivals, National Aviation System non-weather delays, and security. The percentage unaccounted for are flights not delayed.

SOURCE: Bureau of Transportation Statistics

in the national aviation system, which includes airport runways and air traffic control facilities.

Aviation experts disagreed on the usefulness of the new method of reporting.

Kevin Mitchell, chairman of the Business Travel Coalition, said consumers are unlikely to find the report useful because it contains so much data, but travel writers and industry analysts will be able to interpret the information for them.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Woman gets 10 years for running over woman in mayo dispute

HOUSTON (AP) — A woman who ran down a McDonald's restaurant manager when she didn't get mayonnaise on her cheeseburger was sentenced to 10 years in prison on Thursday for aggravated assault.

Waynetta Nolan, 37, had said she didn't mean to run over Sherry Allen Jenkins, drag her across the parking lot of a south-west Houston McDonald's and break her pelvis.

A jury took less than an hour on Wednesday to convict her and then took four hours Thursday to sentence her.

State Bar of Texas eliminating jobs

AUSTIN (AP) — The State Bar of Texas is cutting 29 jobs and closing six field offices connected to the chief disciplinary counsel's office, which administers lawyer discipline. The changes, made public Thursday, are effective March 31, 2004.

The move is intended to save money and is part of an overall review begun during the Texas Legislature's sunset review of the State Bar. The new State Bar Act eliminates one level of hearings in the attorney discipline process and adds alternative methods for resolving attorney-client conflicts that might not rise to the level of professional misconduct.

Bush says any new Mideast peace plan should follow his blueprint

By Barry Schweid
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — President Bush showed guarded interest Thursday in an unofficial peace plan for the Middle East but held firm to his own approach that calls for a democratic Palestinian state and the end of terror attacks against Israel.

"We appreciate people discussing peace," Bush said. "We just want to make sure people understand that the principles of peace are clear."

The president's remarks were directed at the unofficial plan produced by a Palestinian official and an ex-Israeli justice minister that has drawn support from former President Carter and a number of other international figures.

The architects, Yasser Abed Rabbo, a veteran Palestinian negotiator who is on the Palestine Liberation Organization's executive committee, and former Israeli Justice Minister Yossi Beilin are in the capital lobby-

ing for support.

They are due to meet on Friday with Secretary of State Colin Powell, who endorsed their effort publicly last month. Elliott Abrams, who deals with Middle East issues at the National Security Council, is expected to participate.

On the eve of the session, which would lend at least a measure of credibility to the plan, the House majority leader, Rep. Tom DeLay, R-Texas, called for its rejection.

"Entertaining freelance peace plans — like the Geneva plan — that morally equate terrorism and self-defense is not only counterproductive to the peace process but dangerous in its validation of terrorists and terrorism," DeLay said.

Bush, responding to reporters' questions in the Oval Office, dealt carefully with the plan that has been condemned by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Rabbo said Wednesday it has the support of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

"Everyone knows where I stand," Bush began. He said peace begins with having a

Palestinian state based upon democratic principles and with leaders "committed to defeating and dismantling the terrorist organizations."

As for Israel, the president said, it must help the Palestinian state emerge. "And that's why we are continuing to talk to them about the illegal settlements and outposts" that Israel has built in the West Bank, and about a security barrier being constructed partially within the West Bank in an effort to keep out attackers, the president said.

Powell, at a news conference with NATO foreign ministers in Brussels, Belgium, said the administration was strongly committed to the U.S.-backed road map produced jointly by the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations.

"The road map captures the vision that President Bush laid out" in a speech in June 2002, Powell said.

"But that is not to say there are not other ideas out there that people have," Powell said. Like Bush, the secretary of state said the Palestinians must bring attacks against Israel to an end.

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