Airports call for mind shift on capacity and performance management, demanding urgent revision of European airport slots rules

Rome, 27 November 2024: As the *AIRPORTS INNOVATE 2024* conference unrolls in Rome this week, bringing together global airport innovators and top tech minds, ACI EUROPE has set out a strategic and all-encompassing vision for capacity and performance management at Europe's airports.

Joining two newly launched publications — the updated **Airport Capacity Position Paper[1]** and the **Airport Operations Centres Guidebook[2]**, ACI EUROPE underlined the central and unique role airports play in managing their capacity and operations and the need for increased alignment and cooperation amongst all stakeholders involved — from airlines, Air Navigation Service Providers and ground handlers to regulators. This becomes even more salient in the context of increasing operational disruptions and capacity constraints faced by the aviation ecosystem and the expected expansion of traffic demand.

According to EUROCONTROL's Aviation Outlook 2050, demand for air traffic in Europe is expected to grow by 44% by 2050 compared to 2019 levels. As a result of airport capacity misuse as well as acute lack of investment, up to 12% of passenger demand will not be accommodated by European airports due to a number of factors limiting their capacity.

Recognising that physical capacity limitations are unlikely to go away for most of Europe's airports, the ACI EUROPE Airport Capacity Position Paper sets out how airports go about managing this capacity crunch in the making — with a clear focus on maximising the use of existing facilities and unlocking latent capacity wherever possible. The key measures outlined include the optimisation of existing airport facilities, the deployment of new technology and procedures, better integration between ground operations and Air Traffic Management as well as strong community relations programmes.

Crucially, the Paper also stresses the urgency of revamping outdated airport slot allocation rules as well as the important role of airport charges modulation in incentivising more efficient behaviour from airport users.

The Paper's underlying vision is one that puts the airport operator in the captain's seat to drive improved efficiency and performance with a focus on improving the passenger experience, maximising air connectivity and sustainability. This requires breaking down silos, developing common situational awareness, integrated operations and collaborative decision-making with all airport stakeholders involved.

Olivier Jankovec, ACI EUROPE Director General said: "*Running an airport is too often akin to managing a factory you have invested in without being able to really control its throughput and performance. That needs to change. The constraints we face on developing physical capacity along with the sustainability imperative and increased disruptions — notably from weather — only mean one thing. That airports need to be recognised and empowered to become the masters of their own capacity and performance. This must start with a revision of European airport slot rules, to ensure more transparency and efficiency — and also safeguard the integrity and competitiveness of our aviation market.*"

NEW GUIDANCE ON AIRPORT OPERATIONS CENTRES

In a bid to support European airports in efficient management of their capacity and operations, ACI EUROPE today released a brand-new guidance document on Airport Operations Centres (APOCs). By bringing all operational stakeholders of an airport together, the APOC acts as the nerve centre of the airport ecosystem and helps to improve efficiency and safety in airport operations as well as passenger experience. The APOC is relevant for all airports regardless of their size, as all airports face similar challenges and are platforms used by multiple operational stakeholders. In order to efficiently manage the existing capacity, as well as target unlocking latent capacity, all stakeholders operating at an airport need to be involved.

Jankovec added: "*The APOC is a crucial tool in the hands of airport operators to improve the overall performance of the system, as well as establishing an important platform for ongoing communications between the many actors involved in ensuring punctual and pleasant journeys for our passengers. APOCs are also a boon for the Network, as they serve as an important interface with the Network Manager sitting within EUROCONTROL, enhancing data sharing and common situational awareness in Europe as a whole. With this new guidance we set out to provide a concrete and usable framework for those airports looking to set up their APOC from scratch, as well as useful tips for airports looking to enhance their APOCs — after all an APOC is constantly evolving, adopting new technologies and processes and innovating to better address the many challenges we face as an industry.*"

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1 Access ACI EUROPE's updated Position Paper on Airport Capacity here: ACI EUROPE POSITION PAPER - AIRPORT CAPACITY.pdf
2 Download your copy of the ACI EUROPE APOC Guidebook here: ACI EUROPE APOC Guide Book.pdf

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ACI EUROPE is the European region of Airports Council International (ACI), the only worldwide professional association of airport operators. ACI EUROPE represents over 500 airports in 55 countries. Our members facilitate over 90% of commercial air traffic in Europe. Airports and air connectivity support 14 million jobs, generating €851 billion in European economic activity (5% of GDP). In response to the Climate Emergency, in June 2019 our members committed to achieving Net Zero carbon emissions for operations under their control by 2050, without offsetting.