



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## EU's 2027 deadline for operating aid puts regional airports at risk — Extension needed to protect vital air connectivity

### ACI EUROPE

Boulevard du Régent 37-40 (5th floor)  
1000 Brussels, Belgium  
[www.aci-europe.org](http://www.aci-europe.org)

**Brussels, 5 March 2025:** ACI EUROPE today responded to the European Commission consultation on the revision of Aviation State aid Guidelines on behalf of the European airport community, reiterating that **operating aid to Europe's regional airports must be extended to safeguard vital air connectivity.**

The European Commission has previously acknowledged the importance of State aid in ensuring fair competition and at the same time maintaining regional air connectivity. However, the 2027 deadline for phasing out operating aid — currently under review — fails to account for the economic realities faced by these airports.

Due to the high fixed infrastructure costs and lack of economies of scale — in short, the fact that operating an airport has a high base cost regardless of passenger numbers — regional airports often face the challenge of financial viability. This issue has existed for decades, and is now exacerbated by structural changes in the aviation market post-COVID as well as by the impending impact of the EU Fit for 55 climate legislation. While the goal of reducing aviation emissions is crucial, the new regulations will disproportionately impact small airports by increasing operating costs and making air travel more expensive on less busy routes. Airlines, especially low-cost carriers that serve many regional airports, will pass these costs onto passengers, leading to reduced demand.

In recognition of the long-lasting financial unviability of regional airports, also spurred on by costs related to compliance with aviation security regulation and the proliferation of aviation taxes, the EU Aviation State aid Guidelines have allowed those airports with less than 3 million passengers per annum to receive State aid aimed at covering their operating costs deficit (operating aid). This was done in recognition of the crucial role these airports play for the connectivity of their communities and the economic development of the EU. ACI EUROPE recognises that the ceiling for airports to receive operating aid could be reduced to 1 million passengers per annum.

Conversely, removing this aid would not lead to greater efficiency but rather to the closure of essential infrastructure, harming economic and social cohesion across Europe. This would in particular deepen the

divide between well-connected metropolitan areas and regions that depend on air transport for economic sustainability.

Allowing operating aid for smaller airports is not only justified but essential. The recently published report from Mario Draghi on '*The Future of European Competitiveness*' pointed out that the EU's workforce is set to shrink by 2 million workers each year by 2040, meaning that **productivity must drive economic growth** instead. Given the strong correlation between air connectivity and GDP growth, maintaining operating aid is a strategic necessity for the EU's economic future. The data is unequivocal — a +10% increase in direct air connectivity leads to a +0.5% rise in GDP per capita.

For smaller and regional airports the COVID-19 crisis is still not over, as they are the slowest to recover amongst European airports, with traffic down by an alarming 34.5% compared to pre-pandemic passenger volumes (2019)<sup>1</sup> — in short, their survival is at risk. To safeguard economic growth and connectivity across Europe, it is therefore vital that Member States retain the option to provide operating aid to these airports.

---

1 Source: ACI EUROPE Airport Traffic Report December, Q4, H2, Full Year 2024

**## ENDS ##**

**For more information, contact:**

Agata Lyznik  
Director of Communications & Media  
Tel: +32 2 552 09 89  
Email: [agata.lyznik@aci-europe.org](mailto:agata.lyznik@aci-europe.org)

**ACI EUROPE** is the European region of Airports Council International (ACI), the only worldwide professional association of airport operators. ACI EUROPE represents over 600 airports in 55 countries. Our members facilitate over 95% 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.