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Airlines' call for Spanish airports to slash user charges by 22% reflects a parallel reality – not market & economic fundamentals

Brussels, 18 February 2026: ACI EUROPE today strongly rebutted IATA's call for the Spanish airport operator, AENA, to reduce its charges by 22% over the next 5 years (2027-2031) while still maintaining its €13 billion investment plan over the same period.

The airport association delivered a robust reality check, pointing to the following facts:

1. The charges paid by airlines for the use of AENA's airports have decreased by -7% in nominal terms over the past 10 years (2015-2025), actually resulting in a -36% decrease in real terms.

   Meanwhile airfares in Spain have increased by +40% since 2019 – revealing what has for years been clearly established: changes in airport charges are not passed through to consumers, as airlines always seek to exercise their pricing power[1]. This means that airlines' calls for reductions in airport charges are all about protecting their bottom line.

2. AENA's €13 billion investment plan aimed at modernising and developing the capacity of the Spanish airport network cannot be delivered without adjusting its user charges to reflect both inflationary pressures and capital costs.

   AENA's proposed +3.8% annual increase from 2027 to 2031 (amounting to an increase of 43 cent per passenger) is fair, reasonable and grounded in economic reality – especially as regards inflationary pressures.

3. A central point in IATA's claim that AENA's investment plan is compatible with a decrease in its user charges relates to an alleged underestimation of future traffic growth by AENA. While IATA asserts passenger traffic will grow at an annual average of +3.6% by 2031, AENA's forecast at +1.3% reflects the combination of:
   i) Existing and mounting capacity limitations at several of its airports.
   ii) Supply chain disruptions and aircraft maintenance challenges which according to IATA will keep constraining aircraft capacity deployment and thus traffic growth in the coming years[2].
   iii) The "normalisation" of traffic growth at lower levels due to a mix of structural factors including market maturity, changed demand and ESG pressures.

Olivier Jankovec, Director General of ACI EUROPE said: "*When it comes to airports, IATA really does live in a parallel world where money grows on trees and where traffic risks do not exist – and cannot be rewarded in case of upsides. Like several other major European airport operators, AENA is at the start of a massive and unprecedented capital investment cycle which will enable the modernisation and development of key strategic infrastructure – supporting Spain's and Europe's competitiveness, global position and cohesion. After 10 years during which its user charges went down significantly, there is just no other option than to increase them.*"

He added: "*Make no mistake, the airline's agenda on this is not about the economy and consumers. It is entirely self-serving and short-term obsessed. While IATA recently announced that European airlines are projected to deliver the strongest financial performance globally in 2026*[3]*, it still denies the reality of airports as businesses in their own right – taking us back to the times when airports were used as instrument of airline cross-subsidisation.*"

[1] ICF study: "Identifying the drivers of Air fares" (2018)
[2] IATA press release, 9 December 2025: "Aerospace Supply Chain Bottlenecks Continue to Constrain Airlines"
[3] IATA press release, 9 December 2025: "Airlines Profitability Stabilises with 3.9% Net Margin Expected in 2026" – IATA data also shows that Europe's airlines net profit per passenger has doubled between 2019 and 2025.

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