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AIRPORT CONGESTION MANAGEMENT: SLOT CONTROL AND OTHER TOOLS

Palm Beach International Airport
Citizens' Committee on Airport Noise

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Shared regulatory responsibility

- **Federal Aviation Administration.** Exclusive authority over the operation of aircraft, certification of pilots, and control of airspace.
- **State and Local Governments.** Authority to regulate the siting of airports and landing areas and exercise zoning and land use authority to ensure land use compatibility.
- **Airport Proprietor.** Often a State or Local Government, responsible for the construction of facilities, regulation of business relationships with tenants, safe and efficient ground operations at the airport.



All roles are subject to federal laws

- **U.S. Constitution**
 - Undue burdens on interstate commerce
 - Equal protection under the law
 - Supremacy of federal law
- **Airport Noise and Capacity Act of 1990**
 - Limits on new noise or access restrictions
- **Airline Deregulation Act of 1978**
 - No regulation of air carriers' prices, routes or services
- **FAA Grant Assurances**
 - Comprehensive regulation of airport operations/finances



Proprietary actions prior to 1990 (ANCA)

- Prior to ANCA, airport proprietors adopted a range of programs to limit noise and manage capacity:
 - Operating curfews
 - Overall limits on number of aircraft
 - Operating reservation and/or slot controls
 - Noise budgets and restrictions
- Many of these programs resulted in litigation, occasionally resulting in settlements that established capacity controls.



Airport Noise and Capacity Act of 1990

- Established national noise policy, born out of Congressional concern over proliferation of local efforts to solve noise
- Prohibited adoption of any new “noise or access restriction” affecting Stage 3 (or higher) aircraft without first following comprehensive review and approval procedures



What is a “noise or access restriction”

- Very broadly defined and implemented by the FAA
- Includes laws, ordinances, lease provisions, and practices
- Express examples (14 CFR 161.5) include:
 - Limits on the noise (single-event or cumulative)
 - Limits on total number of operations
 - Noise budgets or noise allocation programs
 - Limits on hours of operation or curfews
 - Airport use charges that directly or indirectly control noise



Access restrictions vs. congestion management

- Access restrictions limit capacity to address noise or other environmental concerns.
- Congestion management tools (i.e., slots) seek to maximize capacity while reducing delay.



How are restrictions approved under ANCA?

- Public notice to all airport stakeholders
- Substantial evidence to support FAA findings:
 - Reasonable, nonarbitrary, and nondiscriminatory
 - No undue burden on interstate or foreign commerce
 - Maintains safe and efficient use of the navigable airspace
 - No conflict with existing Federal statute or regulation
 - Adequate opportunity for public comment
 - No undue burden on national aviation system
- The FAA has never approved a new restriction under ANCA



Congestion management tools

- FAA initiatives (airspace and runway congestion)
 - Traffic Management Initiatives
 - Expect Departure Clearance Times (EDCT)
 - Slot controlled airports
 - Special Traffic Management Programs (STMP)
- Airport proprietor initiatives (other facility congestion)
 - Airline agreements
 - Rates and charges
 - Slot controls (by facility)
 - Reservation systems (prior permission required)



What is a slot?

- The term “slots” refers to an advance authorization to take off or land on a runway on a particular day at a particular time, granted through a formal program, administered in accordance with international norms
- Common at airports internationally, very few in US
- Administration under the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and Airports Council International (ACI) Worldwide Airport Slot Guidelines (WASG)
- Other operational restrictions are not “slots”



Slots maximize capacity and efficiency

- Designed to reduce operational delays resulting by spreading operations out throughout the day.
- Limitations are based on actual facility constraints
 - Runway capacity
 - Number of gates



IATA Congestion Designations

- **Level 1:** Capacity is generally adequate to meet the demands of airport users at all times.
- **Level 2:** Potential for congestion during peak periods which can be resolved by schedule adjustments *mutually agreed* to by the airlines and a facilitator
- **Level 3:** Demand regularly exceeds capacity; unacceptable systemic delays without advance operating approvals



How do slots work?

- Scheduled airlines submit schedules twice annually
- Historic slots are entitled to priority
- Biannual meetings to allocate slots or adjust schedules
- Minimum usage requirements
- At Level 3 airports, *unscheduled* operations may be limited and require advance reservations



How is an airport designated?

- The FAA may designate an airport as a Level 2 or Level 3 airport and impose a slot control program with respect to runway capacity.
 - JFK, LGA, and DCA are the only Level 3 airports.
 - ORD, LAX, EWR, and SFO are Level 2 airports.
- Airport proprietors may establish Level 2 slot programs for constrained facilities (i.e., international terminal at MCO), but these programs are voluntary and airline-focused.



Slots and General Aviation

- Approximately 64 percent of aircraft operations at PBI during CY2024, and the driving factor of congested periods, were unscheduled general aviation operations.
- Slot procedures are designed for scheduled operations and ineffectively manage general aviation operations.
- Other procedures are typically necessary to manage congestion of general aviation facilities.



Other congestion management tools

■ **Prior Permission Required (PPR) Programs**

- Imposed in coordination with the FAA to manage temporary capacity challenges, including general aviation.
- Must comply with federal policies:
 - Grant Assurance 19 – “Promptly notifying pilots of any condition affecting aeronautical use of the airport.”
 - Reasonable and not unjustly discriminatory access required.
 - FAA final arbiter of safety/efficiency
- E.g., Las Vegas-area airports during NFL Draft



Other congestion management tools

■ Congestion Pricing

- Generally, airport sponsors must establish rates and charges for an airport that are reasonable and not unjustly discriminatory.
- “A properly structured peak pricing system that allocates limited resources using price during periods of congestion will not be considered to be unjustly discriminatory.”
- Only for “congested” airports: number of operating delays is one per cent or more of the total operating delays at the 55 airports with the highest number of operating delays.



But what about [insert airport here]?

- **JFK / LGA / DCA:** Level 3 slot programs imposed by FAA
- **HPN / SNA:** Allocations on flight operations, established by sponsor and grandfathered under ANCA
- **LAS:** Short-term prior permission required (PPR) programs, linked to major events and coordinated with FAA
- **DAL:** Statutory limitations imposed in connection with planned growth of DFW



Thank you!

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