

 SOUNDBITE

// *Air travelers are cranky and have good reason to be.* **//**



— Mary Peters, U.S. Secretary of Transportation, last September, as President George Bush instructed aviation leaders to address the growing problem of congestion in U.S. airports.

According to a government study¹, more than 25 percent of all U.S. domestic non-stop flights arrived late from January to August 2007, the highest level ever recorded. A total of 128 regularly scheduled flights arrived late (at least 15 minutes after schedule) at least 80 percent of the time.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) responded immediately by asking U.S. and Canadian airlines to discuss voluntary reductions in their air schedules, starting at New York's JFK, LaGuardia and Newark airports. (Any delays at these airports, which handle a third of the nation's air traffic, can cause a ripple effect across the United States.) In addition, the FAA proposed congestion pricing as a way to encourage airlines to move some flights to off-peak slots.

Several industry groups, including the Air Transport Association, condemned the suggestions as "anti-consumer" since they limit choice. The International Air Transport Association also urged the U.S. government to avoid congestion pricing, which it says has never proven to be effective and "could invite disaster" by disrupting the interconnect schedules of international carriers.

Meanwhile, a similar study of U.K. airports conducted by the Civil Aviation Authority indicated that 32 percent of scheduled flights were late from April to June 2007, compared to 28 percent in the same quarter in 2006. Travelers may be cranky for some time to come ...

¹ Air Travel Consumer Report, issued October 2007