

AAA Corporate Travel Newsletter

December 28, 2009

TSA strengthens measures; longer security lines likely

In light of the Christmas Day incident where a passenger tried to blow himself up on the plane, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has implemented stricter guidelines for airport and in-flight security.

Because the TSA does not want the terrorists to know its plans, it has been intentionally vague with its public announcements. Media reports have indicated that some airline contacts have advised that hand luggage will be restricted to one for international flights. Other reports advise that in-flight entertainment will be curtailed and that flight maps will no longer be displayed.

The situation will become clearer in the coming days. In the meantime, we advise clients traveling to get to the airport much earlier than normal. Airlines will not take responsibility for any delays travelers encounter with TSA. For the latest official information from the TSA, please see their site, www.tsa.gov. Here is a link to their current guidelines: [TSA Guidance for Passengers](#).

DOT issues new rule limiting tarmac delays

Last month, the Transportation Department said it wanted to “send a signal” about consumer protection when it fined Continental and its ExpressJet affiliate \$100,000 for stranding passengers on the tarmac for six hours at a Minnesota airport. And now DOT has gone a step further, issuing a comprehensive new rule on tarmac delays and other consumer protections that will take effect in 120 days. “Airline passengers have rights, and these new rules will require airlines to live up to their obligation to treat their customers fairly,” said Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood. The new rule makes final a proposed rulemaking issued by DOT in November 2008; some of the consumer protection provisions had also been included in an FAA funding bill that is still working its way through Congress. DOT said it expects to initiate another new rulemaking as well, to strengthen airline reporting and disclosure requirements for things like baggage fees and total fare inclusions.

The new rules include:

- A provision requiring U.S. airlines to let domestic passengers off an aircraft that has been stuck on the tarmac for more than three hours, “with exceptions allowed only for safety or security or if air traffic control advises the pilot in command that returning to the terminal would disrupt airport operations,” DOT said. That

last condition is significant because it takes the decision about operational disruptions away from the pilot and his airline and puts it into the hands of the control tower. As for international flights, U.S. carriers will have to specify in advance their own time limits for deplaning passengers stuck on the ground, with the same exceptions permitted. What’s more, after two hours on the tarmac, airlines will have to make sure passengers have adequate food, drinking water, working lavatories, and medical attention if needed. Airlines that don’t comply will face substantial fines.

- A requirement that airlines stop scheduling “chronically delayed flights,” and promising enforcement action for unfair and deceptive practices against those carriers that don’t comply.
- A rule that airlines must designate an employee to monitor the effect of delays and cancellations, respond to consumer complaints, and tell customers where they can file complaints.
- Requirements that carriers display delay information on their web sites for every domestic flight, adopt customer service plans, and monitor their compliance with those plans.
- A provision that airlines cannot retroactively apply changes to their contracts of carriage that could negatively impact passengers who have already purchased tickets.

The Air Transport Association, a trade organization of the nation's airlines, has long opposed a requirement to deplane passengers from aircraft on the tarmac waiting to take off. ATA said in a statement that its members will comply with the new rule, "even though we believe it will lead to unintended consequences - more cancelled flights and greater passenger inconvenience." ATA argued that the requirement to deplane passengers after three hours on the ground "is inconsistent with our goal of completing as many flights as possible."

Editorials in some major newspapers agreed with the airlines: The Los Angeles Times said the three-hour tarmac limit "could do more to delay passengers than speed them on their way," and the Chicago Tribune argued that the rule could encourage airlines "to pre-emptively cancel flights rather than risk the exorbitant penalties." But the National Business Travel Association - a trade organization for corporate travel managers - praised the new DOT rule. "DOT has showed great leadership in issuing landmark regulations to protect passengers," NBTA said.

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U.S. delays deadline for 'Real ID' driver's license requirement

Thousands of air travelers who might have been denied boarding effective January 1 and beyond can breathe a sigh of relief: The Department of Homeland Security has pushed back from December 31, 2009 to May 11, 2011 the deadline for all states to issue their residents new driver's licenses that meet tighter security requirements.

The so-called Real ID driver's licenses were mandated in a law passed by Congress in 2005, but the requirements of the law have faced significant opposition from a number of states that said they couldn't afford to make the necessary changes in the time allowed. The significant aspect of all this for business travelers is a stipulation in the law that only Real ID driver's licenses could be accepted as identification by airport security officers. That was supposed to take effect this week, but for now, travelers can still use their old non-compliant licenses to get through airport security.

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Continental plans 2010 debut for in-flight Internet service

Continental is the latest U.S. airline to jump on the in-flight Wi-Fi bandwagon. The company said it will team up with Aircell to offer the latter's Gogo Inflight Internet service - the same vendor used by Delta, American, United, AirTran, Virgin America, and starting in 2010, US Airways. Continental said the service will be available starting in the second quarter of 2010, initially on its fleet of 21 757-300s, which are used mainly on domestic routes. Customers will be able to use their own Wi-Fi equipped laptops and other devices to log into the service once the aircraft reaches 10,000 feet. The cost of the service ranges from \$4.95 to \$12.95 per flight, depending on the length of the flight and the type of device used.

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Northwest flight numbers will begin to disappear next year

Officials of Delta Airlines told an investment conference in New York that the company expects to receive a single operating certificate for Delta/Northwest operations in a few weeks, clearing the way for Delta to fully absorb Northwest into its system. They said that the airlines' two separate pricing systems have already been combined, and that their separate reservations systems will be merged in the next few months. That means that over the course of 2010, Northwest's flights will be renumbered and recoded as Delta flights, although passengers holding bookings on NW operations will be protected without having to do anything. Company officials said that Delta expects to record a \$1.5 billion loss for 2009, with the bulk of that deficit accounted for by fuel hedges that went wrong as the price of oil declined. They also said that barring any downturn in the economy, Delta expects to maintain the same level of capacity in 2010 that it had this year, which was about 7 percent below the peak levels of 2007.

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Southwest's schedule will grow by 41 daily flights in May

Southwest Airlines has unveiled its spring/summer schedule, which takes effect May 9, with plans to eliminate 24 daily roundtrips but to add 65, for a net gain of 41 daily flights. The carrier earlier had said it will add a new destination next spring (beginning May 23) - northwest Florida's Panama City Beach - and it announced it will fly there from Nashville, Houston Hobby, Baltimore/Washington and Orlando, with two daily roundtrips in each market. At

Denver, Southwest said, it will add one extra daily frequency on routes to BWI, New Orleans, Oakland, Portland, Sacramento, Seattle, Spokane, Tampa Bay and Tulsa on May 9 - with more to come later in the summer.

Southwest said it “has intentions of adding 15 additional flights to/from Denver beginning in August 2010,” but it won’t announce details until a later date. At St. Louis, where American is significantly shrinking its network, Southwest plans to add new service to Los Angeles and Nashville, each with two daily roundtrips; plus new once-a-day non-stop service to New Orleans, Raleigh/Durham, San Diego and Seattle.

Also on the schedule are new routes linking Seattle with BWI, Kansas City and Nashville, each with one daily roundtrip; a new route from Nashville to Oakland; new daily non-stop service from LAX to BWI; and a new Las Vegas-Norfolk flight. The only route being dropped in May is Southwest’s Ft. Myers-Islip, N.Y. service.

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