

RELIEVING AIRPORT CONGESTION

Virtually everyone who has ever waited to meet someone on an incoming flight, particularly during "rush hour" on the runway, has their own tale of woe to tell. Of those, one or even two hours after the flight had been reported landed, they were still waiting for the passenger to clear customs and immigration.

In an ideal world, however, they would not have to wait longer than 45 minutes. For that is the target time frame that ICAO, acutely aware of current airport congestion and the urgent need for more streamlined procedures for entry and departure, is working towards. To have every passenger cleared in just 45 minutes regardless of the airport's location, size of aircraft, and the hour of arrival.

For not only is congestion at airports causing indigestion for the travelling public, but it also results in much higher costs for the air transport industry. Costs that inevitably filter down to the paying passenger.

For example, the **Air Transport Action Group (ATAG)**, a coalition of organizations which have joined forces to press for

aviation infrastructure improvements on a worldwide basis, determined that the average delay in flights in the U.S. between January and September 1993 was 8.4 minutes per departure.

Since there were 4.4 million departures by the major and national U.S. carriers in that period, this produced a total delay of 616,000 hours. At an average annual utilization rate of 3,200 hours per aircraft, this total represents an amount equivalent to using nearly 200 aircraft for an entire year!

According to ATAG, such delays in the U.S. are now estimated to cost the airlines and their customers more than US\$3 billion a year. Also that similar sums could be lost in the rapidly-expanding Asia/Pacific region without early concerted aviation infrastructure planning and investment.

It should also be noted that these estimates do not take into account the related losses to commerce and industry, as a result of increased distribution costs, and the need to maintain higher prices to pay for the inefficiencies of the system.

FACILITATION PROGRAM

It is important to remember, however, that while airlines are more often than not blamed for delays and problems with airport procedures, they must always walk a very fine line between passenger convenience and the demands of security and other national interests.

