



Dec.29, 2006 - June 13, 2007
CAPBOR
AIRLINE
STRANDING
REPORT CARD

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Executive Summary

This report card is based on a combination of press reports, government statistics and eye witness accounts provided by our coalition members. Because airlines do not report and the US Department of Transportation (DOT) does not collect most data on strandings resulting from cancellations and diversions, this report is necessarily incomplete, albeit based on the best available information.

At present, flaws in government statistics include the following:

- The government misleadingly counts cancelled flights – those with tarmac delays -- as having zero delay;
- does not include diversions in most delay statistics;
- does not collect data on extended-on-the-tarmac confinements in diversion and cancellation incidents;
- does not report abandonment of passengers for diverted flights, where planes leave passengers to fend for themselves in Cheyenne or Scotts Bluff, Wyoming;
- and ignores the observations and experiences of the people who actually fly.

For example, according to the most recent government data, only 36 planes were held on the tarmac for 5 hours or more in 2006.

- **Data include only extended taxi-outs:** That number only includes **extended taxi-outs** of planes holding on the tarmac at their initial airports that eventually took off.
- **No cancellations:** Those DOT data calculations do **not** include events such as the Valentine's Day 2007 Jet Blue events at JFK, where 10 planes were held more than 4 hours, then **cancelled**.
- **No Diversions:** Those DOT data do **not** include the 101 American Airlines and American Eagle planes from California that were **diverted** to Austin and other points, then sat on the tarmac for at least 4 hours on December 29th, 2007.
- So, while the DOT reports that American had 1,701 (of a total of 16,186 total diversions), it fails to report that **at least** 101 of those 1701 involved extended tarmac delays.
- As a result of deficiencies in the DOT reporting, the Coalition finds that airlines have been able to make the misleading claim that strandings and extended-on-the-tarmac confinements are extremely rare. In the last six months alone, the Coalition estimates -- based on press and passenger reports -- that at least 10 separate **Diversion and Cancellation** incidents involving 8 airlines, 135 planes and the stranding of thousands of passengers have occurred that would not be or (in the case of December 2006 incidents) have not been included in DOT data calculations.
- The Coalition also finds that the airlines often leave passengers in unhygienic conditions during any of these long tarmac delays and deny them adequate food, potable water or access to medicines.

This report is an attempt to give a more accurate picture of airline passenger strandings, provide airline passengers an easy way to compare of airline stranding performance, and encourage the government to provide for meaningful airline passenger rights. The fact that some airlines have received A's and B's and others D's and F's on this Report Card also shows that providing decent customer service and avoidance of strandings is both achievable and should not place an undue burden on the airline industry or lead to higher ticket prices.

The goals of the Coalition for an Airline Passenger's Bill of Rights follow:

- 1) What's Possible:
 - a. That airline passengers' general well being and needs are provided for by all airlines.
- 2) What We Intend as an Outcome:
 - a. Legislation to hold airlines accountable to honoring basic passenger rights.

3) How We'll Know When We Are There:

- a. Legislation is passed that both defines and states a clear minimum standard for deplanement, provides for passengers' essential needs while experiencing an extended onboard delay, mandates truth in disclosure regarding chronically delayed flights and cancelled flights, and returns baggage to folks within 24 hours.
- b. When CAPBOR Scorecards indicate excellence in Customer Service, Honesty and Execution of the newly defined minimum standards.

4) What We Know Now:

- a. We know that the statistics published by the Department of Transportation regarding Strandings don't tell the truth. Reporting to the public that only 36 flights were held on the tarmac for 5 hours or more "prior to departure" appears to be a clear and intentional misrepresentation of the truth by the DOT, since it only includes extended taxi-outs by planes that eventually took off, but doesn't include diversions and cancellations involving extending delays.
- b. We know that Flight Diversions and Cancellations are where the majority of long term strandings occur for which no accountability is required by the DOT from the airlines. In other words, it's not what the statistics say, but what they don't say here that matters.
- c. We know that Flight Attendants are asked to provide misinformation to the passengers about why flights are Stranded.
- d. We know that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!

What We Don't Know Now:

- e. We don't know how many additional flights are Stranded each year other than passenger accounts related to us through our petition, press articles, and media releases from airline spokespersons.
- f. We don't know the extent to which the airlines are hiding these events

How this Document is Organized

- DOT Report Card
- Airline Report Cards
- Special Awards
- 1st CAPBOR "When You're on the Ground, They Treat You Like Dirt" Award

DOT Report Card

Before we talk about the airlines, we think it is important that we lay some groundwork in regard to the Department of Transportation. Much of the data we will discuss about the airlines comes from press reports and observations made by passengers. The reason that we must rely so much on empirical observation is that the DOT does not require the airlines to disclose the amount of time that a flight sits on a tarmac when it is diverted to an alternate airport, or when the flight leaves the gate but is later cancelled.

The following report card show how many diverted flights occurred last year for each airline, but for which the DOT collects no data for the time the flight landed until it took off again or proceeded to a gate.



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Diversions	Time on Tarmac – Diversions¹	DOT Grade
493	Air Tran Airlines	Incomplete
1701	American Airlines	Incomplete
1297	American Eagle	Incomplete
521	Atlantic Southeast Airlines	Incomplete
629	Comair	Incomplete
1058	Continental Airlines	Incomplete
1112	Delta Airlines	Incomplete
1956	Expressjet	Incomplete
808	JetBlue	Incomplete
646	Mesa Airlines	Incomplete
859	Northwest	Incomplete
640	Skywest	Incomplete
1753	Southwest Airlines	Incomplete
1088	United Airlines	Incomplete
1019	US Airways	Incomplete



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Grade	DOT (DON'T OPPOSE TARMAC-ING): DO NOTHING AWARD
F	Imposes fines but forgives 50% of penalty amount ²
F	Investigated only 1 out of 121 diverted flights from Dec. 29 th , 2006
F	Doesn't publicize Consumer Hotline. Doesn't staff the hotline with humans (voice mail).
F	Doesn't respond to consumer complaints they do get.
F	Did not respond to letters asking about their investigation of Strandings for April 24 th , 2007 and what penalties they would impose on American.

Airline Report Cards

We present the following report cards for the airlines.

- **1a. Fewest Tarmac Delays of 2 or more hours**
Based on DOT data. Does not include diversions and cancellations. It is worth noting that airlines like Southwest and Frontier operate in the same hubs and airspace as the other airlines mentioned in this report, yet have far fewer delays, even as a percentage of overall flights as airlines such as American, US Airways, Continental and United.
- **1b. Most Tarmac Delays of 2 or more hours**
Based on DOT data. Does not include diversions and cancellations. High rate of delays is primarily a function of poor scheduling and staffing. Weather is a factor, but poor overall management is controlling even in the face of weather.

Scoring for fewest and most tarmac delays is as follows:

.00% - .04% = A
.05% - .09% = B
.10% - .14% = C
.15% - .19% = D
.20% and above = F

- **2. Diverted / Cancelled Flights of 4 Hours or More**
Shows known tarmac strandings based on press reports and eyewitness accounts. DOT does not collect or report this data.
- **3. Longest Known Tarmac Delays**
Lists worst known tarmac strandings based on press reports and eyewitness accounts. DOT does not collect or report this data.
- Effects of Tarmac Delays:
 - **4. Crisis Management (During Extended Tarmac Delays)**
Based on both eyewitness accounts and press reports.
 - **5. Starvation Diet Menus**
Eyewitness accounts – denied by airlines.
 - **6. Overflowing Toilets**
Eyewitness accounts – denied by airlines.
- **7. Customer Service Plans / Contracts of Carriage**
Analysis and scoring of airline customer service plans.

Summary of Report Cards

Airline	1. Tarmac Delays 2+ Hours	2. Diverted/ Cancelled Flights 4+ Hours	3. Longest Tarmac Delays	4. Crisis Mgt	5. Menu	6. Toilets	7. CSPs	Scoring Average	Final Grade
Air Tran Airlines	B	I	I	I	B	I	I	2.0	B
American Airlines	D	F	F	F	F	F	D	4.7	F
Aloha Airlines	A	I	I	I	I	I	I	N/A	N/A
Alaska Airlines	A	I	I	I	I	I	I	N/A	N/A
American Eagle	C	F	I	I	I	I	D	4.0	D
ATA Airlines	D	I	I	I	I	I	I	N/A	N/A
Atlantic Southeast Airlines	A	I	I	I	I	I	I	N/A	N/A
Continental Airlines	F	F	F	I	B	F	C	3.8	D
Delta Airlines	B	F	F	I	C	F	C	3.8	D
Expressjet	F	I	I	I	I	I	I	N/A	N/A
Frontier Airlines	A	I	I	I	I	I	I	N/A	N/A
Hawaiian Airlines	A	I	I	I	I	I	I	N/A	N/A
JetBlue	D	F	F	I	C	F	C	4.2	D
Mesa Airlines	B	I	I	I	I	I	I	N/A	N/A
Northwest	B	I	F	I	F	I	C	3.7	D
Southwest Airlines	A	I	I	I	C	I	C	2.3	B
United Airlines	D	F	F	I	F	F	C	4.5	F
US Airways	C	F	F	I	F	F	C	4.3	F

This report card is not an overall consumer performance evaluation. It focuses on how airlines react to extended ground delays. In the absence of necessary DOT information, it relies on press accounts and empirical data collected by the Coalition. Grading system is A-F with points awarded 1-5 (A=1). Incomplete data = 0. Due to the incomplete way that the DOT collects data, this is the most prevalent grade. In order to get a final grade, there had to be more than one category graded. So for example, while Atlantic Southeast had an A in DOT reported tarmac delays, since there is no data for the other categories, no final grade is assigned.

1.0-1.7 = A 1.8-2.5 = B 2.6-3.3 = C 3.4-4.2 = D 4.3-5.0 = F



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Grade	1a. Fewest Tarmac Delays of Two Hours or More³	Flights
A	Hawaiian Airlines (0% of total flights)	0
A	Aloha Airlines (0% of total flights)	1
A	Alaska Airlines (.01% of total flights)	27
A	Frontier Airlines (.03% of total flights)	29
D	ATA (.18% of total flights)	36
A	Atlantic Southeast Airlines (.03% of total flights)	80
B	Mesa Airlines (.05% of total flights)	164
B	Airtran Airlines (.07% of total flights)	171
A	Southwest Airlines (.02% of total flights)	218



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Grade	1b. Most Tarmac Delays of Two Hours or More⁴	Flights
D	American Airlines (.19% of total flights)	1206
F	Express Jet (.26% of total flights)	1135
D	United (.18% of total flights)	884
F	Continental (.26% of total flights)	795
C	American Eagle (.12% of total flights)	678
C	US Airways (.11% of total flights)	545
B	Delta (.08% of total flights)	410
D	Jet Blue (.19% of total flights)	294
B	Northwest (.05% of total flights)	238



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Grade	2. Diversions and Cancellations 4+ Hours on Tarmac (thanks to press and passenger accounts)	Flights
F	American Airlines and American Eagle Dec 29 th , 2007 - Austin; 87 flights + April 24 th 13 flights + May 8 th , 2007 – 1 flight – Palm Beach	101
F	United Airlines Sydney, O'Hare, Newark, Milwaukee	4
F	Delta Airlines March 17 th , JFK and PHL	8
F	US Airways March 17 th	8
F	JetBlue February 14 th	10
F	Continental Airlines Houston and JFK (flight 82 12/29/06)	3
F	Spirit Air 4/9/2007, Detroit	1



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Grade	3. Longest Time on the Tarmac / Stranding (thanks to press and passenger accounts)	Hours
F	United Airlines SFO to Sydney. 5/15/07 Crew left passengers on plane... ⁵	13+
F	American Airlines JFK: Flight #955, 2/15/07 to Buenos Aires	12+
F	JetBlue Airways ⁶ February 14 th	11+
F	Delta Airlines Flight #132, 2/14/07	10+
F	Continental Airlines Dec 29 th , Flight 82	9+
F	US Airways PHL: March 17 th	8+
F	Northwest Airlines Flight #1192, March 24, 2007	8+
F	United Airlines ⁷ Feb, 2007 O'Hare	8+



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Events	4. Crisis Management	Grade
4	American Airlines: Austin, TX Three ambulances, one hazmat (to clean up dog poop and resulting vomiting on plane), three planes, 12/29/06	F
2	American Airlines: Palm Beach, FL Two ambulances, one plane, 05/08/07 ⁸	F



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Grade	5. Stranding Diet
B	Airtran All flights have at snack or meal in coach, no emergency provisions.
B	Continental Less than 1 hour – free beverage. Over one hour, peanuts or pretzels and a beverage, over 1.5 hours free snack, no emergency provisions.
C	Delta Airlines They have assorted snacks on every flight, no emergency provisions.
C	JetBlue Always a honey roasted peanuts (80 calories)/mini pretzels (50 calories), no emergency provisions.
C	Southwest All flights honey roasted peanuts (80 calories)/or snack pack, no emergency provisions.
F	American Airlines Buy your own water \$2.00, no emergency provisions.
F	United Airlines No snack for 2 hours or less, no emergency provisions.
F	USAir No snack – Purchase meal for 3.5+ hr flights, no emergency provisions.
F	Northwest Must pre-order purchased food 13 hours in advance. No snack, no emergency provisions.



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Grade	6. PU: Overflowing Toilets
F	American Airlines ⁹
F	Continental Airlines
F	Delta Airlines
F	JetBlue
F	United Airlines
F	US Airways



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Grade	7. Customer Service Plans / Contracts of Carriage
D	American Airlines
C	Continental Airlines
C	Delta Airlines
C	JetBlue
C	Northwest
C	Southwest Airlines
C	United Airlines
C	US Airways

Contract of Carriage Details

AIRLINE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Score*
United	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	7
Delta	N	N	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	N	N	6
Continental	Y(1)	Y	Y(2)	Y(2)	N	N	N	N	N	N	6.7
American Airlines	Y	N	Y	N	N	N (3)	Y (4)	N(5)	N	N	5
US Airways	Y(6)	N (7)	N	N	Y	N	Y (4)	Y	N	Y(8)	6.5
Jet Blue	Y	Y (9)	Y	Y	N	Y(10)	N	Y	N	Y	7.7
Northwest	Y	N	Y	Y	N	Y(11)	Y(12)	Y	N	Y(8)	8.5
Southwest	Y	Y(13)	Y	Y	Y	N	Y(14)	N	N	N	8.1
Weighting	1	3	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	-

* **Final Scores out of 15 possible points***See legend and footnotes below***NOTES:**

Scoring/Grading:

- 12.0-15.0 = A
- 9.0-11.9 = B
- 6.0-8.9 = C
- 3.0-5.9 = D
- 0.0-2.9 = F

Legend:

1. Does Customer Service Plan ("CSP") specifically address stranding, long tarmac confinements, and diversions?
2. Does CSP provide for passengers to deplane after 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or more hours?
3. Does CSP provide for a/c, food, water, sanitary conditions to be maintained during long tarmac delays?
4. Does CSP provide for medical treatment for passengers in need of such?
5. Does CSP provide for passengers to communicate with the outside world?
6. Does CSP provide for compensation for long tarmac confinements? (If so how much or what in kind?)
7. Does CSP provide for hotel, ground transportation, and/or alternative transportation?
8. Is CSP legally binding on the airline?

9. Is there a dispute resolution system? (If so, does it provide for a neutral decision maker?)

10. What if any penalty is there if an airline does not comply with its customer service plan or contract of carriage?

All airlines measured received a failing grade for customer service plans relating to stranding. Scoring methodology: Items 2 and 3 given triple weight and item 5 double weight as judged most important by stranded passengers. Footnoted items may be given partial credit.

Footnotes:

1. *"Except for ground delay situations resulting from restrictions or limitations caused or directed by air traffic control (ATC) the processes...."*
2. *"will make every reasonable effort to provide food, water, restroom and access to medical treatment."*
3. Refund for cancelled flights only
4. Alternate transportation yes....only if airlines at fault; Not for reasons caused by ATC or weather.
5. Some essential needs specified in Contract of Carriage. All commitments are qualified by *"Subject to Availability"*.
6. In Contract of Carriage
7. Airline will *"evaluate"* deplaning after 2 hours
8. Possible breach of contract.
9. After 5 Hours
10. \$25 - \$50 vouchers for *"controllable irregularity"* of 1-4 hour delay. Credit on future flights for 4-6 hour delay. Double credit or \$100 voucher for 6+ hours delay.
11. May provide \$5.00 or \$10.00 drink/meal coupon or 500/1,000 FF Points for long delays.
12. Alternate transportation yes.
13. Only discusses deplaning in general terms
14. For *"missed connections"*, not at flight origination.

Special Awards



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Grade	Take the Money and Run Award	Passengers
F	United Express – Operated by SkyWest Dec 2006 – Cheyenne ¹⁰	150
F	United Express – Operated by Trans States Airlines Mar 2007 – Scottsbluff, NE ¹¹	~50
F	American Connection – Operated by Trans States Airlines Mar 2007 – Scottsbluff, NE ¹²	~50



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Grade	Above and Beyond
A	Hawaiian Airlines They just don't seem to strand people!
A	Aloha Airlines During a stranding event the pilot allowed them to return to the terminal and wait in the comfort of the terminal.
B	Southwest Airlines 3 hour stranding, Pilot offered to let them off, they Got to their destination and got a free round trip ticket upon their return

Final Results



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**“When you’re on the ground they treat you like dirt”
Award**

American Airlines

No food, most known strandings, most known crisis mismanagement, high Time-on-the-Tarmac statistics. Highest negative score – 4.7.

Endnotes

- ¹ Source: Bureau of Transportation Statistics;
http://www.transtats.bts.gov/OT_Delay/OT_DelayCause1.asp?pn=1 ; All carriers, all airports, January 2006-December 2006. "Download Raw Data" for details.
- ² Source: McCartney, Scott (2007). *What Happens When Airlines Break Customer-Service Rules*.
http://online.wsj.com/public/article_print/SB118099899407524313.html. Wall Street Journal.
- ³ Source: Bureau of Transportation Statistics;
http://www.bts.gov/programs/airline_information/taxi_out_times/html/by_carrier_2007_01.html ;
- ⁴ Source: Bureau of Transportation Statistics;
http://www.bts.gov/programs/airline_information/taxi_out_times/html/by_carrier_2007_01.html
- ⁵ Source: Rochfort, Roger (2007). *Fog wreaks airline havoc*.
<http://www.smh.com.au/news/national/fog-wreaks-airline-havoc/2007/05/14/1178995079800.html>
. The Sydney Morning Herald.
- ⁶ Source: Author unknown (2007). *Toilets, tempers overflow as passengers left stuck on plane for 11 hours*. <http://www.komotv.com/news/national/5842366.html>. AP
- ⁷ Source: Author unknown (2007). *Stuck on a plane*.
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/chi-0703020248mar02,1,4197562.story?coll=chi-opinionfront-hed>. Chicago Tribune.
- ⁸ Source: Author unknown (2007)
<http://www.airportbusiness.com/online/article.jsp?siteSection=1&id=11974> . Miami Herald, The KRT.
- ⁹ Source: Cummings, Claire (2006). *Passengers stuck on plane for over 8 hours*.
<http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/bus/industries/airlines/stories/123006dntswstrand.ed.331dc32.html> . Dallas Morning News.
- ¹⁰ Source: Stoller, Gary (2007). *Abandoned in Cheyenne*.
http://www.usatoday.com/money/biztravel/2007-02-19-cheyenne-cover-usat_x.htm. USA Today.
- ¹¹ Source: Stoller, Gary (2007). *2 more flights abandon fliers in way to Denver*.
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- ¹² Source: Stoller, Gary (2007). *2 more flights abandon fliers in way to Denver*.
http://www.usatoday.com/money/biztravel/2007-02-20-airport-abandoned-usat_x.htm . USA Today.