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On-time performance has been a growing issue for the global aviation industry during the past few years, and Chinese carriers are no exception to the late arrivals due to numerous flight delays.

■ By Rakesh Narayanan | *Ascend* Contributor

The Test Of Time



A surprise to many first-time visitors to China is that this vast country only has a single time zone — Beijing Standard Time. Under “normal” geographic time-zone assignment, there would probably be at least four different time zones in China, but the Chinese government prefers to maintain time-zone commonality to ensure that businesses and government agencies have a common standard of time. This demonstrates a concern about timeliness that is a hallmark of the country’s business culture.

Of course, the single time zone is not the only surprising characteristic about China. The most startling characteristic of modern China is its growth. Beijing, in particular, is building on a massive scale to prepare for the 2008 Summer Olympic Games. As the celebrations are fast approaching, the entire country is gearing up to show the world the modern and efficient face of China. Spectators coming from around the world will experience China for the first time when they board a Chinese airline and arrive at Chinese airports in cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

Therefore, it is absolutely critical to ensure proper service at airports and for airlines to set the image of China as modern, efficient and fast growing. The Chinese government is staking a great deal

of its reputation on the efficiency of the transportation systems installed in time for the Olympic Games. Reliability and on-time performance are key service items and leave a lasting impression on passengers. The Chinese Civil Aviation Authority, airports and airlines are all cognizant of the requirement for efficiency and are working to improve the end-to-end traveler experience.

During the past several years, China has experienced exceptional growth in the aviation markets, which has come with some growing pains. CAAC allowed the industry to grow rapidly without substantial constraints, but now regulations are following this growth. The average on-time performance for arrivals in China is 71.48 percent. Although this is in line with many regions in the world, Chinese on-time performance needs an overhaul. The delays impact 32.3 million passengers a year and cause schedule disruptions equal to 267,000 hours annually. The financial impact to the airlines could be as high as ¥6.17 billion (approximately US\$868 million).

OTP in China is loosely defined and reported due to a lack of standardized central reporting. Each carrier reports differently within China based on type of flight, origin or destination airport, and

similar characteristics. Delay standards (+15 minutes, +25 minutes) are different from one airport to another. Individual airlines do not necessarily conform to coding the delay in a standard manner, and record keeping varies between airlines and government bodies. The CAAC has vowed to correct this situation and improve the overall performance of airlines and airports within China.

Collateral delays pose the most significant cause for delays among most carriers — a staggering 42 percent in China. Collateral delays occur when a late in-coming flight affects a follow-on flight (or flights), which is often the case. There is little a governing body can do to reduce collateral delays except to minimize the cause of the original delays and ensure schedules have extra resiliency to allow for recovery.

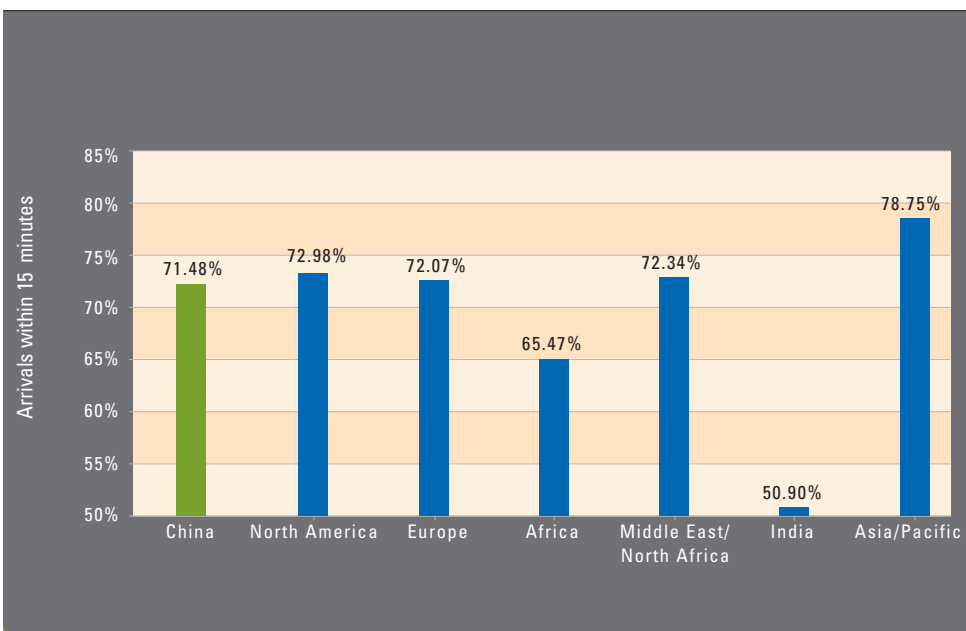
The next-highest culprit is weather, which is at the crux of 20 percent of China’s flight delays. In January, an alarming issue came to light with the inability of the country’s airports and airlines to respond to unusually severe weather. Hundreds of thousands of passengers were stranded at various airports around China before the Chinese New Year, a peak travel season. Aircraft could not be de-iced due to lack of facilities and had to be grounded. In total, travel was in chaos at this busy time because the weather affected train, ground and air transportation services. While weather cannot be controlled, the impact of weather delays can be effectively managed with better planning and resources.

The primary controllable delay in China is related to maintenance at 13 percent of total delays. This volume of delays suggests two probable points of improvement:

1. China needs to reduce the amount of time to resolve equipment failures that result in delays (AOG, or aircraft on ground).
2. The airline’s schedules need to be more resilient to allow recovery following AOG incidents.

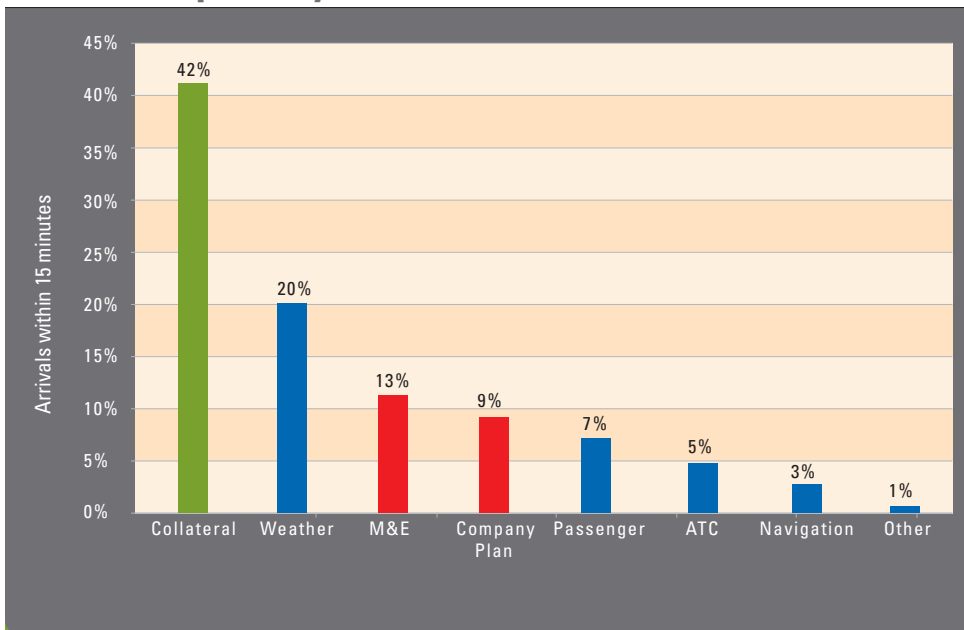
Another controllable but important reason for delays is due to schedule volatility, which are termed “company plan.” Airlines in China alter flight schedules within the last 24 to 48 hours prior to operation due to commercial or slot issues. For every carrier in China, 70 percent of the schedule is published, confirmed and approved by CAAC for the season, but the remaining 30 percent of the schedule the airline needs to constantly re-submit to the CAAC for approval. This leads to inefficient planning for airlines and last-minute disruptions that contribute to reduced on-time performance.

Arrival On-Time Performance



China’s on-time performance for arrivals within 15 minutes falls in the middle when compared to other regions of the world. But at 71.48 percent OTP, there is much room for improvement.

China Top Delay Reasons



Several factors are to blame for flight delays in China, but collateral delays, those caused by the domino affect of one late aircraft impacting down-line flights, account for the majority of flight interruptions.

passenger, security, regular and irregular operations procedures. Training of and enforcing these procedures is paramount to efficient operation.

A number of new technologies are available to help address OTP issues, such as global positioning systems, electronic flight bag and decision-support technologies, such as the Sabre® AirOps® Operations Suite and the Sabre® Rocado® Airline Operations Suite (along with business consulting to bring about the specific improvements). These technologies assist in the enhancement of the operation and on-time performance of the aviation industry as well as greatly improve efficiency.

During a day-long seminar last November in Beijing — which was hosted by Sabre Airlines Solutions®, for the CAAC, airlines and airports — more than 100 airline executives had the opportunity to discuss OTP issues, their resolution and how these resolutions might be applied to China. CAAC Vice Minister Yang Guoqing summed up the meeting by committing Chinese aviation to improving the complete passenger experience.

China is undergoing exciting aviation expansion in concert with its overall explosive growth, and the CAAC strives to ensure that this growth protects the interests of travelers, airlines and airports. **F**

Improving OTP in China will require a concerted effort between the CAAC, the airlines and the airports. First, the CAAC needs to take a proactive approach in overhauling regulations to keep pace with the growth and present conditions in China. For example, the schedule volatility issue can be significantly improved by providing standardized slot control for the

busiest airports. Next, procedures at airlines and airports need to improve to bring consistency in the operation. Such airport procedures should consider the constraints at individual airports and include ramp, security, passenger movement, airside and landside procedures. Airline procedures should be closely related to the airport procedures and should include in-flight,

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+count it up

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The percentage of global CO₂ emissions aviation is responsible for, and it will represent 3 percent by 2050, according to the International Air Transport Association.

23

The percentage of CO₂ emissions all modes of transport combined account for, according to the International Air Transport Association. Of that, 74 percent is road and 12 percent is air transport.

50

The amount of years in which the industry is challenged to build a zero-carbon emission aircraft, according to the International Air Transport Association.