

# What's the delay in the USA?

OPSGROUP Team

9 April, 2021

Destination	Time	Flight	Gate	Status
Dallas Ft. Worth	10:42am	5156	F21	On time
Dallas Ft. Worth	1:15pm	9081	F6	On time
Denver	9:09am	5070	E11	10:06am
Denver	10:50am	5252	E11	On time
Denver	12:55pm	5438	F11	On time
Denver	2:19pm	9056	F16	4:00pm
Denver	4:00pm	6350	E13	On time
Detroit	10:40am	2363	E4	On time
Edmonton	12:00pm	6744	G3	On time
Eugene	11:52am	5530	F6	On time
Eugene	4:07pm	6399	F3A	On time
Eureka	4:10pm	6319	F15L	On time
Everett	11:01am	5871	F7	On time

We took a look at the stats the FAA publish about on-time performance to find out what the most common causes of delays are, which airports are worst affected, and what we can do to manage it.

## On your marks...

First up, what counts as a delay? Your airline or operator might be a bit stricter on this, but the FAA consider a flight delayed if it arrives more than **15 minutes late**. Which is probably what your passengers really care about as well.

The FAA gather their info from a bunch of carriers, and break it all down into five basic categories of delay:

- **Air Carrier:** This is something under the airline's control like crewing, maintenance type issues. So that time you wanted a Starbucks coffee and the queue was really long and you held the flight up.
- **Extreme Weather:** We are talking the big, bad stuff like hurricanes, blizzards, tornadoes... the things that shut airports for hours.
- **National Aviation System:** This is pretty broad and covers ATC, airport ops, high traffic volume sorts of situations. They also throw general weather into this (the stuff that airplanes and ATC should be able to deal with).
- **Late-arriving aircraft:** A knock on effect from a previous flight delay.
- **Security:** Broken X-ray machines, long queues because of that passenger who thought he could sneak a tiger on in his hand luggage type scenarios.



Security is surprisingly the least to blame for delays

### Pick a month

Here come the statistics...

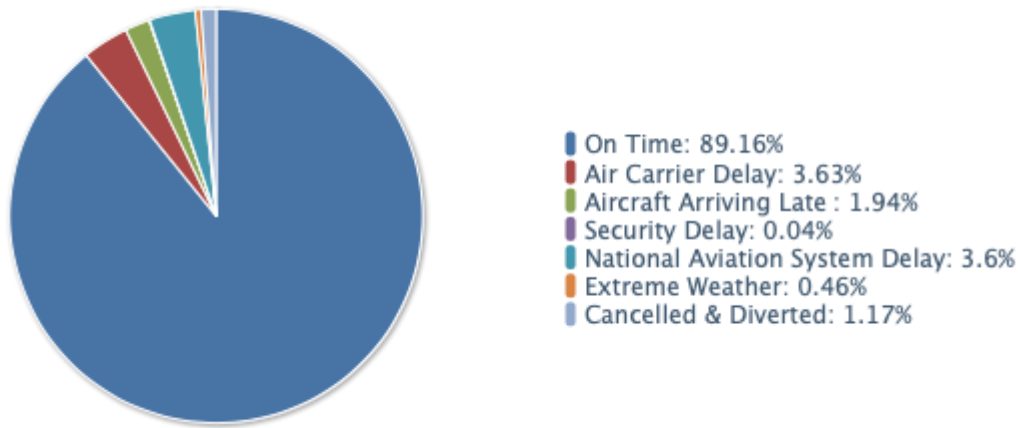
In January 2021, **89.16% of flights were on time** – which ain't bad, but ain't great. So, of the remaining 10.84%, what were the reasons for the delay?

**Air Carrier Delays** are the big offender, checking in at **3.63%**. The airlines only have themselves to blame...

Although, **NAS** came in a close second with **3.6%**.

Then there was the knock-on effect of **one late flight making the next flight late**. This accounted for **1.94%** of delays, with 1.17% because of previous cancellations and diversions.

**Extreme weather** came in at just **0.46%**, while **security delays** only resulted in **0.04%** (probably because those passengers were just left behind).



The Stats for Jan

## Weathering the delays

**Weather only accounts for 4% of delays**, which might seem low, but remember we are talking 'extreme weather'. Non-extreme weather should be manageable which is why "normal weather" causing delays falls under NAS.

If we dig a bit deeper and take a snapshot look at a random month (we picked May 2019 because everything was fairly normal back then), then weather was the reason for **65.62% of NAS delays**. That is a whopping 27,864 delayed flights or 1,822,469 minutes.

## Which airport is the worst?

Let's take a look at the airports to look out for.

**KDFW/Dallas Fort Worth** in Texas. A check of all the 29 major US airports in Jan 2021, and Dallas was the only one coming in with an on time performance **below 80%**.

10.48% of KDFW's delays were down to NAS. But let's not be too quick to tell off ATC yet. Just under **21% was due to high volumes of traffic**. Just under 31% was because of runway closures and a whopping **45% was** due to nasty weather (major winter storms).

The runners-up for worst delays were **KORD/Chicago** and **KFLL/Fort Lauderdale** which came in at 84.58% and 86.44% respectively. Fort Lauderdale's NAS accounted for just over 6% and 8% was because of traffic volume problems.





Dallas Fort Worth was hit by some major snow storms in early 2021

## Stop boring me with statistics

OK, that is enough facts and figures. What are we really talking here? Well, the two biggies are the **Air Carrier delays** and **delays from NAS** (most of which seem to boil down to weather).

Bad weather means a backlog of traffic, often a lot of detour requests to manage, or diversions to support and this means a **much higher workload** for our ATC colleagues to try and deal with. Even when it is “just” rain, or a windy day, this leads to delays. We can’t change the weather, but we can plan for it.

Delays are not just a cost and customer service issue – they are also a big fuel consideration...

## So what can we do about them?

- **Check the forecasts.** Planning for those delays in advance is a good idea because chances are they are going to result in some long holds, and long holds need fuel. Don’t just think about your destination weather – have a look at the alternates as well because when one airport shuts because of weather, others nearby probably will as well. If they don’t, then they are going to fill up fairly fast with diverting traffic.
- **Check the peak times.** If you are not a scheduled carrier then try to plan your flights to head in at non-peak times to avoid high traffic volume delays.
- **En-route stuff.** If you are delayed out of somewhere then you can try and make that time up en-route. Speeding up might seem like a good plan, but in reality unless you’re talking a mega long flight this probably isn’t going to make a huge difference to your time (but probably will to your fuel burn). Asking for directs however, is a good way to chop the time down.

- **Check the schedule.** If you depart late then check your schedule time. With a decent tailwind you might find your flight time still brings you in early in which you don't want to go speeding up and then find yourself having to wait for a parking spot
- **Winter planning.** Winter (de-icing) is probably the biggest cause of delays out so get those calls in early if you need to de-ice and plan ahead.

On-time performance is great, but sometimes delays are just unavoidable. So while we can all **“think on time”** a bit more, thinking about safety (and not rushing) is still the best mentality any pilot can have.

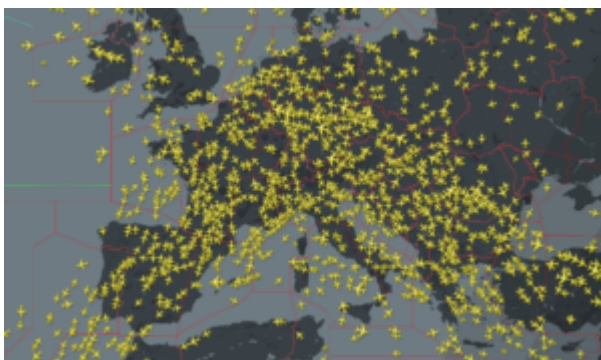
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## European ATC delays are up 133%

OPSGROUP Team  
9 April, 2021



**In Short:** European ATC delays are on the increase, caused by staffing and capacity shortages. Monitor the **Network Operations Portal** and be flexible in your routing options if bad weather or capacity constraints are expected.



It's been a great few days on a sun-soaked Mediterranean

island. Your passengers are onboard, you are about to close the door, and then you get told your Calculated Take Off Time (CTOT) is an hour from now! Sound familiar? You're not alone! ?

European air travel this summer is surging and about to hit maximum intensity. Problem is, the ATC system doesn't seem to be coping, and the misery of long flight delays keeps getting worse.

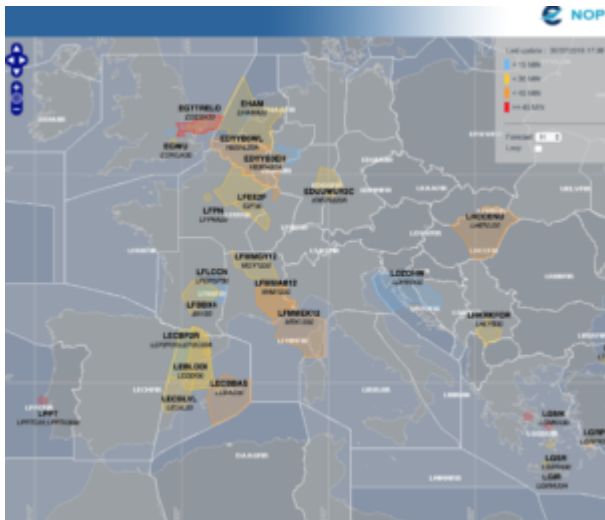
## Delays are up

IATA has **recently reported** the following:



*"Data from Eurocontrol shows that in the first half of 2018, Air Traffic Management (ATM) delays more than doubled to 47,000 minutes per day, **133%** more than in the same period last year. **Most of these delays are caused by staffing and capacity shortages** as well as other causes such as weather delays **and disruptive events such as strikes**. The average delay for flights delayed by air traffic control limitations reached 20 minutes in July, with the longest delay reaching 337 minutes."*

As an operator, you may be used to seeing alerts like these daily:



Several sectors regulated due to Airspace Management and ATC Staffing/Capacity.

Moderate to high delays.

### **LFMM (Marseille)**

Several sectors regulated due to ATC Capacity/Staffing.

Moderate to high delays.



## So is it a story of too many planes and not enough airspace (capacity) or just not enough controllers (staffing)?

Local airlines are not impressed. **Ryanair took to twitter** this week calling the delays “unjustified”.

In a unusually **aggressive statement** IATA commented that “key ANSPs in Europe have not made needed investments in their businesses, preferring instead to make super-normal profits.”

## Some of the things we recommend to keep on top of expected delays



### Review the Network Operations

- **Portal** regularly – This will assist in making operational planning decisions based on the current delays and capacity restrictions. Also keep an eye on the **NOC tactical briefing** for the following day which may also assist.
- **Avoid the early morning rush** of departures if you can (**0900z**).
- Be **flexible** in your **routing options** if bad weather or capacity constraints are expected.
- **Discuss with the local FBO** for latest on-ground situation to better plan arrival and departure.
- **Monitor Opsgroup** – members are always posting the latest information on recent airport and overflight experiences. Not yet a member? **Go here!**
- **Subscribe** to our **Daily Brief** to get all the latest info on ATC strikes, Airport closures, and everything else causing delays.

Got any tips or tricks on how to avoid or minimise most of these delays? Is there certain bit of airspace, airports or a time of day you've found that works best? **Let us know!**

**Extra Reading:**

- **European Air Traffic Control Delays Loom over Summer Air Travel** (IATA)
- **Europe's ATM Is Still Struggling With Capacity**
- **European airlines call on Brussels to prevent airspace 'meltdown'**
- **Flight delays in Europe are surging this year**