

More Feb. flights canceled, but no long tarmac delays

By Roger Yu
USA TODAY

The 16 largest U.S. airlines reported having no flights stuck on airport tarmacs for more than three hours in February, despite massive snowstorms that shut airports and snarled air traffic across the country.

That's down from 60 long tarmac delays in February 2010, the Transportation Department's Bureau of Transportation Statistics reported Tuesday.

However, passengers were widely inconvenienced. The number of flights canceled by the airlines soared for the month. Almost 5% of flights — or about 22,200 of 455,500 — were canceled. February's rate of 4.87% was the second-highest rate of cancellation for any February and the eighth-highest of any month on record, the bureau said.

In January, another month in which snow snarled traffic and closed airports, 3.9% of flights were canceled.

While no passengers were stranded on tarmacs for more than three hours, the bureau said passengers on 19 flights were stuck on planes at airports in February for more than two hours before their flights were scratched.

The Transportation Department began holding fines of up to \$27,500 per passenger over the airlines last April if they had flights sit on the tarmac three hours or more without letting passengers off. Since then, only 16 delays of more than three hours were reported through February of this year. That compares with 664 planes that were stranded from May to February of last year, the bureau said.

The industry's on-time arrival rate also dipped in February, primarily as a result of the weather. The carriers reported that 74.5% of their flights arrived on time in February, down from the 74.7% of February 2010 and January's 76.3%.



By McKenna Ewen, AP

Snowy: Airport crews worked to clear the tarmac on Feb. 21 at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

A flight is considered on time if it arrives within 15 minutes of schedule.

Hawaiian Airlines, which flies largely where there's no snow, posted the best on-time arrival rate (91.8%), followed by AirTran (82.6%). American Eagle fared the worst (62.7%).

The rare bit of good news reported by the bureau for passengers was the cancellation rate for flights in February was lower than a year before, when 5.4% of the flights were canceled, the highest on record.

The bureau also reported:

► **Chicago O'Hare's performance lags.** Among the 29 busiest airports in the country, O'Hare reported the worst rates in both arrivals (62.7%) and departures (60.9%) in February. Charlotte (81.2%) had the best arrival rate, while Portland (85.3%) topped the on-time departure list.

► **Mishandled baggage rate improves.** The airlines reported a mishandled baggage rate of 3.59 reports per 1,000 passengers in February, down from both February 2010's rate of 3.93 and January's 4.20.

► **Customer complaints drop.** The Transportation Department received 687 complaints about airline service from consumers, down from 770 in February 2010, and 855 in January.

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