SITA

Flight On Time Performance, is it time for a change on how airlines are measured against OTP ?

With both airports adopting A-CDM across the globe and ANSPs adopting the role of a CFMU (Central Flow Management Unit) is now the time to start re-thinking how we measure OTP for airlines?

Today the industry measures airlines using On Time Performance (OTP), which is the off-block time for a departure and the in(on) block time for an arrival. But as we are evolving Airport Operations, do we need to update the triggers for OTP?

One of the concepts of A-CDM is working hand in hand with an air traffic flow management system (ATFM) is that departing flights are only ideally allowed to push back (off block) once the resources are ready for them i.e. taxi ways, runways, ATC sectors etc. This often results in aircraft being held at the stand if the runway capacity at the time is unable to cater for a particular flight (a later Target Take Off Time (TTOT) which results in a delayed Target Startup Approval Time (TSAT)) or if the flight becomes regulated due to ATFM capacity, then the resulting ATFM enforced take off time (CTOT) may also result in a flight being held at the stand for longer.

For either of these two reasons if the TSAT is later than the Target Off Block Time (TOBT), then the aircraft is typically held at the stand until the TSAT (or in some circumstances the aircraft may be moved to another remote stand if the currently occupied stand is required for in inbound flight (Push and Park). This is also true for non A-CDM airports if the flight is regulated with a defined take off time.

The issue with measuring OTP in the current way is that the airline has no control over their OTP time as it is managed either by the Pre-Departure Sequencing at the airport (TTOT) or ATFM regulation (CTOT), either way it is an ATC event. This means that the airlines have no control over the actual off block time that we use to measure OTP today (unless they delay it of course if the aircraft is not ready in time), this is unfair no? (Even in non A-CDM airports, the actual OK to push back is still a ATC event).

This often causes a reluctance to adopt A-CDM in many airports, in fact in some geographies as a whole as airlines are reluctant to take such risks on their OTP metrics.

Perhaps a change is needed to give airlines a fair chance to influence their own OTP measurements, especially bearing in mind that A-CDM and AFTM methodologies have been proven to increase efficiencies as whole.

A suggestion for a departure OTP would be that when the flight is ready and has complied with the TOBT in ACDM airports or the pilot is in the position to send the READY to the tower where no TOBT event exists, this would drive the airlines to aim for the TOBT and/or READY time which is in their control. Once this milestone has passed, the ownership becomes an ATC metric for OTP as to when they give the actual pushback approval time.

Working with Ground Handlers over the past couple of years , it dawned on me that many ground handlers have already implemented this change, many GHs now refuse to be held to Off Block times in their Turn Around SLAs, they appreciate that the actual off block approval trigger is an ATC driven event. Their SLA is to have the aircraft (flight) ready on time (typically measured by doors closed Passenger and Cargo) or sometimes called the aircraft ready time and then confirm that there is no delay on the GH part when the pushback approval is given for the actual physical push back to start I.e. the pushback tug is in position and ready so no delay is incurred once the pushback approval is given.

If Airlines measured the OTP in the same way, the pressure would ease on them to get the aircraft off the stand, even knowing that are major delays in the movement/runway areas, this results in the same delays actually being incurred, but just adding to congestion in the movement area, not to mention the unnecessary burning of fuel whilst waiting in taxi ways etc. Or in the case of ATFM delays, the alternative would be to take off with the risk of major arrival holds and the potential for diversions which are surely less appealing to all than being held at the stand at origin for a period of time.

If the flight was deemed to be ready on time, then ATC would have the ownership for allowing the flight to push back as soon as possible. This simply means that all stakeholders are measured accordingly with the correct KPIs for their relevant areas of the airport operation.

One of the challenges I foresee with such a change is the perception of passengers, and I could well believe the airlines would have concerns in changing the OTP to the ready time, for example, are the passengers capable of understanding such a change ? I think so, already some airlines typically announce on the PA when the flight is ready. Countless flights have I heard the pilot say something along the lines of "Thank you everybody for being so efficient for boarding, we are now fully ready on time and are now awaiting ATC clearance". Everyone typically understands that the airline did their part and got the flight prepped and ready on time and now the onus with ATC.

All changes such as one like this require time to adjust, educate and settle and to become the new normal.

Looking at the way the GHs have changed this in some geographies , I see it would make total sense to measure OTP for departures as the READY time, it simply means the relevant parties (airlines , GHs, ATC, Airport operators etc.) are all being measured for the events that they control, which is not the case for the current OTP measurement as Airlines have no control over off block approval times as discussed. I think such a change would assist in the adoption of A-CDM across the globe and where A-CDM doesn't or isn't planned to be implemented, it still helps to understand where the delays are being incurred and which areas of the operation require attention.

The Off Block time is still a very important milestone and should be recorded and referenced moving forward, the main point is that is no longer captured as an Airline event but as an ATC driven event.

I am hoping this topic does generate some debate as I would very much like to hear what others think
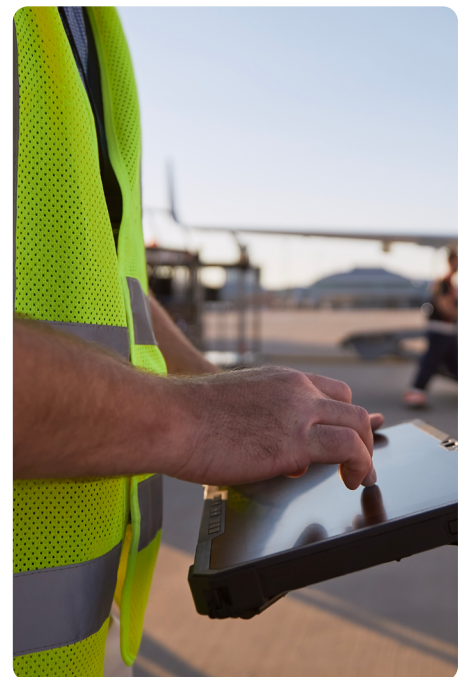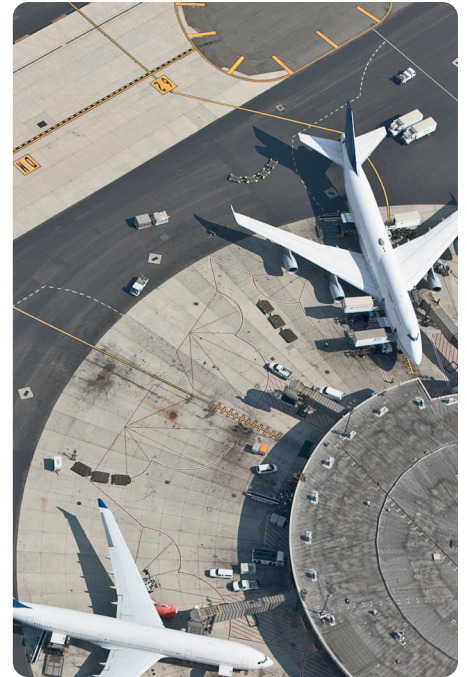
If you would like to discuss this or any other concepts please feel free to reach out, my contact details are below:

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