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Green light for plans for the future: More flexibility for the runway system at Düsseldorf Airport

Strategic groundwork is currently underway for the future of Düsseldorf Airport. NRW's largest airport is planning to become more flexible and demand-oriented during daytime hours in an effort to sufficiently respond to existing and future mobility requirements of the people and the economy of the region. A relevant application to modify the airport's operating license is scheduled for submission to the NRW Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development in June 2014. The airport is, however, determined to keep in mind the interests of their immediate neighbours and plans an information session for residents well in advance of the application submission. Yesterday, the plans for the future of the airport were given the go-ahead by the supervisory board. In an effort to protect local residents, the airport and airlines have agreed at a meeting of the user committee on increasing airport fees according to noise levels similar to the so-called 'Hamburg Model', which will be implemented as of January 1, 2014.

"Our current operating permit is extremely inflexible. Requirements for air travel, however, have changed over the past years. Our aim will therefore be the utilisation of our existing runway system during daytime hours in its current format, but without the inflexible limitations currently in place. Any hours, for example, during which we will be working with two runways concurrently, must be submitted for approval to the authorities a week in advance. This is one of the requirements we need to have lifted. Only then can the German Air Traffic Control have more flexibility in response to bad weather or strikes, for example, and can effectively reduce delays accumulated over the course of a day. These are just some of the advantages we hope to achieve with a more flexible utilisation of our two-runway system," explains Christoph Blume, CEO of the airport management. The secondary use of the northern runway in accordance with the Angerland Agreement will continue to be ensured, as the stipulation to utilise the northern runway only at peak times or for emergencies will remain unchanged.

The airport also plans to operate more demand-oriented in future. Airline requests for so-called 'slots', i.e. time windows for take offs and landings

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in Düsseldorf, have been significantly above availabilities during peak times for years. According to a study ordered by the EU Commission, Düsseldorf Airport ranks among the top five airports in Europe with the highest number of slot requests exceeding actual availability.

Theoretically, Düsseldorf Airport could already now have around 256,000 slot-required traffic movements per year.

However, this number of movements could to date not be achieved, as the currently still available slots are during times, when there is little or no passenger demand and they are therefore unattractive to airlines.

That is why the airport hopes to offer more slots to airlines during high-demand daytime hours in future. During those times, when two-runway capacity is scheduled, the airport hopes to coordinate up to 60 take-offs and landings per hour - which would be in line with currently available capacities of the existing two-runway system in Düsseldorf. During the remaining times, the benchmark value will remain at 43 take-offs and landings per hour - as before, but with an option for a later increase to 45 with relevant proof feasibility considering air traffic safety. Airport management is convinced that under these conditions, and with a realistic capacity utilisation of around 80 % of all available slots, it will become feasible to operate up to 252,000 aircraft movements per year in Düsseldorf.

Airport seeks to utilise idle capacities of its runway system

Christoph Blume: "NRW needs a direct connection with the growth markets of the world to ensure long-term success. That is why Düsseldorf Airport must achieve more flexibility in terms of its operating permit, so as to prevent airlines and enterprises avoiding our state altogether. North Rhine- Westphalia, with its high population and commercial density must stay in easy reach for economic centres around the world now and in the future."

The airport therefore plans to utilise the currently dormant capacity reserves of their existing runway system. With eight additional parking positions, the management hopes to adjust the infrastructure of the airport and allow additional traffic. As part of the new zoning application, the airport would also comply with new provisions under European law. Airport infrastructures - for example runway widths - would be adjusted in anticipation of future requirements of the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) for unified European standards.

Clear focus on the needs of the airport's immediate neighbours

The airport will, however, maintain a clear focus on the needs of the airport's immediate neighbours. "Within the scope of our plans, we feel we have found a sustainable balance between the interests of the regional population and economy and our immediate neighbours, while ensuring that Düsseldorf Airport will continue to be the most important airport in NRW. The plans we will be submitting will have no comparison with projects at other German airports. We are not planning any traffic increase during night-time hours - between 10 pm and 6 am. That means our strict night flight regulations will remain intact as they are," stresses Blume. "Similarly, there will be no additional concerns for our neighbours, as there are no plans for drastic expansions of our current infrastructure, for example an extension or expansion of our runway system. Even the flight paths will remain unchanged."

The envisaged increase in air traffic would, overall, not result in a significant increase in air pollution in the vicinity of the airport. Increased flexibility in the utilisation of the northern runway within the scope of the Angerland Agreement, could decrease delays accumulated over the course of a day and result in reduced traffic during off-peak times. However, airport management is aware that an increase in air traffic during peak times may very well increase noise levels during those daytime hours. Here, the airport plans to protect its neighbours with a voluntary prolongation of its extensive noise protection program, which actually was set to come to completion in July 2014.

The airport in general places much emphasis on keeping its neighbours informed about plans in advance and also about the progress of the upcoming zoning application process. "The zoning application process will give a new perspective to the entire region. We plan to host a number of information events in nearby communities beginning in autumn. Exact dates and venues will be announced in due course," adds Blume.

The airport will offer discussion forums as part of these events, and will furthermore offer citizens opportunities for questions and answers via the airport website, the Citizen Hotline (0211 / 412-2 33 66), the Citizen Info Bus, which will be touring surrounding communities, and of course via the Citizens Office at the airport. Suggestions and comments from citizens in neighbouring communities are welcome at any time before

and also after the rezoning application submission. Every citizen is of course furthermore entitled to submit formal objections.

Airport puts trust in fee structure similar to Hamburg model

In an effort to reduce aircraft noise levels, Düsseldorf Airport will further expand its airport fees for airlines according to noise levels. As of January 1, 2014, the fee structure in Düsseldorf will be adjusted to a similar level as the so-called Hamburg Model. Düsseldorf Airport will therefore voluntarily implement a central issue of the coalition agreement of the Red-Green state government. According to this innovative calculation model, factors like the level of noise emission from an aircraft, its exhaust emissions, and most importantly: the take-off and landing times will have a higher impact on fee calculations than before. In effect, current surcharges for noise will then be differentiated according to the time of day, with significantly higher fees for daytime threshold and night-time take-offs and landings, which may be up to six times dearer. Airport management and airlines have already agreed on these new fee structures at a meeting of the user committee.