



Canadian
Transportation
Agency

Office
des transports
du Canada

Public Attitudes and Awareness of Airline Passenger Protection Final Report

Prepared for the Canadian Transportation Agency

Supplier name: EKOS Research Associates

Contract number: 94001-181175/001/CY

Contract Value: \$6,975.00

Contract Award Date: September 19, 2018

Delivery date: October 2, 2018

Registration number: 046-18

For more information on this report, please contact the Canadian Transportation Agency at:

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français

Canada

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This report summarizes results from a survey of 930 airline travellers.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre: Attitudes et sensibilisation du public sur la protection des passagers aériens

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Catalogue number:
TT4-47/2-2019E-PDF

International Standard Book Number (ISBN):
978-0-660-27949-7

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Please refer to Advitek report #POR 053-17

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and Methodology

The Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) has three core mandates: helping to keep the national transportation system running efficiently and smoothly, protecting the fundamental right of persons with disabilities to accessible transportation services, and providing consumer protection for air passengers. The successful development of effective regulations is contingent on obtaining the views and concerns of the public on their travelling experience.

The CTA contracted Advitek to collect quantitative data through its specialized software from travellers at a number of airports across Canada. EKOS was responsible for analyzing the data and producing a summary report of findings from this survey.

Survey Findings

Communication with passengers

Results reveal that airline passengers place a high degree of importance on the information they receive while travelling by air. Nearly all respondents (96 per cent) say it is important that they are kept informed about what to do if they experience a problem, while just under nine in ten (86 per cent) assign a great deal of importance on being notified of the airline's obligations to passengers. Three-quarters (77 per cent) say it is important that they are apprised of how best to file a complaint.

Email and airline-issued documents consistently rank as preferred channels for receiving this information, although respondents are also receptive to receiving communication through texts and smartphone applications. Airline websites are seen as an important tool when it comes to filing complaints, but their perceived usefulness diminishes when it comes to other forms of information. Airport signage and airport announcements consistently rank as lower-tier preferences.

Results further reveal a strong preference for receiving information about air travel as early as possible. About nine in ten respondents (93 per cent) say it is important they receive information as soon as they encounter a problem. Three-quarters (74 per cent) place a high level of importance on receiving information at the time their reservation is made, while seven in ten wish to receive information at the airport's check-in kiosk (70 per cent) or prior to purchasing their ticket (69 per cent).

Baggage issues

Most airline passengers are aware that airlines can be held liable for lost, delayed, or damaged baggage, although a significant minority – 27 per cent – are not. Compensation for lost or damaged baggage is a near-universal expectation. Virtually all respondents (97 per cent) say it is important that airlines provide payment commensurate to the value of the baggage, while more than nine in ten (94 per cent) place a high degree of importance on having their baggage fees refunded.

Delays and cancellations

Respondents place a high degree of importance on various forms of assistance in the event of a flight delay, particularly re-bookings within a reasonable time frame (97 per cent), overnight accommodations (96 per cent), regular status updates (95 per cent), refund tickets (91 per cent), and free access to communication such as Wi-Fi (86 per cent). Food vouchers are seen as comparatively less important (76 per cent).

Respondents also place a great deal of importance on compensation for delayed flights, particularly complimentary tickets (84 per cent), cash payments (77 per cent), travel vouchers (73 per cent), and flight upgrades (70 per cent). Nine in ten (92 per cent) believe it is reasonable for airlines to offer passengers a choice between a cash payment and other forms of compensation.

Results reveal that airline passengers expect a broad array of services when they are left waiting on board an aircraft that is sitting on the tarmac for more than three hours, particularly functioning washrooms (97 per cent), adequate ventilation (96 per cent), adequate water (96 per cent), regular status updates (95 per cent), medical attention (93 per cent), access to communications (91 per cent), adequate food (88 per cent), and the ability to get off the plane (84 per cent). Weather updates and local news are seen as comparatively lesser priorities (55 per cent and 44 per cent, respectively).

Respondents were asked what they would consider to be fair compensation in the event they that their flight is delayed or cancelled. Expectations are generally low for delays of two hours or less, with respondents suggesting an average cash figure of \$143. Respondents also recommended an average of \$330 for delays of two to six hours, and \$636 for delays of six hours or more. Expectations regarding compensation are noticeably higher when it comes to being denied boarding due to overbooking, with recommendations ranging from \$220 for a delay of two hours or less to \$825 for a delay of six hours or more. Nearly all suggestions for compensation took the form of cash, with most respondents suggesting the cost of the ticket, a fixed cash amount, or a cash payment proportionate to the cost of the flight.

Seating arrangements for minors

Not surprisingly, views on how far children should be seated from their parents vary heavily depending on the age of the child. The vast majority (86 per cent) say that a child under five years of age should be seated either directly adjacent to a guardian or within one seat. Similarly, three-quarters (76 per cent) say children ages six to 11 should be kept within one seat of their parents, although 22 per cent are open to a two-seat separation or a same-row requirement.

Respondents would grant considerably more flexibility when the child is 12 to 14 years of age. Just one-quarter (27 per cent) believe the child should be required to sit adjacent to a guardian, while a similar proportion (22 per cent) believe the seating gap should be limited to one seat. One in six would approve of a two-seat separation (16 per cent), same-row seating (18 per cent), or a three-row limit (16 per cent).