

ACI World Position Paper: Resilience and efficiency through leadership and cooperation

Presented by ACI

Last year will go down as the worst year ever in the history of international civil aviation. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a sobering reminder that health is the foundation of social, economic, and political stability, and that the globe is connected as never before. As the industry continues to navigate the impacts and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, health and safety of travellers, staff, and the travelling public remains an overriding priority.

Our industry will continue to face significant challenges this year, but it is safe to say that we have entered a new phase of the pandemic. There are reasons for optimism: vaccination supply and vaccination rates have increased significantly in recent weeks, a few countries have started easing their lockdowns and, in some parts of the world, falling infection rates show that immunization is beginning to make a positive impact.

While the challenges facing the world and the aviation industry have been significant, the crisis has demonstrated that international cooperation and coordination, between governments and aviation industry groups, have been key to paving the road to recovery. It is this coming together of regulators and stakeholders through the establishment of the ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) which has proved that leadership and cooperation between all parts of the industry can effectively provide leadership and provide for future resilience, where individual organisations could not. CART has been the main vehicle enabling collaboration among governments, and between governments and industry, which has been vital to ensure synergy and coordinated action which is essential to restoring air connectivity and passenger confidence in air travel.

CART's Take-Off Guidance Document (TOGD), which was developed through broad-base consultations with ICAI Member States, international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), and key industry stakeholders, provides practical and consistent guidance to the industry and governments. It has been essential to underpin globally harmonised measures that will support a safe, secure, and sustainable restart and recovery of the aviation sector.

ACI fully support the updated recommendations issued on 12 March by CART, which highlight the interoperability of testing protocols and proof-of-results certification, vaccination for crew and passengers, as well as on appropriate masks for air travel. In addition, guidance on Public Health Corridors has been updated to facilitate the establishment of such arrangements on a bilateral or multilateral level, which would recognise the role of the industry in ensuring health and hygiene measures throughout the passenger journey. The updated guidance will provide immeasurable assistance in promoting the harmonization of measures being introduced around the world to facilitate the restart of air travel, which will demonstrate that aviation is the key engine driving global economic recovery, most notably in the travel and tourism sector.

The CART recommendations continue to provide strategic guidance to the entire aviation community throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including in relation to the prevention of the spread of the virus, the operations of critical humanitarian, repatriation, and air cargo flights, and the re-opening of regular air services. From the beginning ACI World has been an active member of the CART, advocating on behalf of our airport members, and we will continue to promote our members' interests, working closely with ICAO and our industry partners, in the effort to build back better.

Soon after the pandemic began to bite at a global level, airports around the world moved fast to introduce many new health-related measures. To help airports in restoring public confidence in air travel, and to promote global implementation of best practice, ACI lead the way by launching the Airport Health Accreditation Programme (AHA). The programme has been a significant tool in

providing airports with an assessment of airport health measures that are in accordance with the CART TOGD recommendations and in alignment with the joint European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) Aviation Health Safety Protocol and ACI EUROPE's Guidelines for a Healthy Passenger Experience at Airports.

The AHA programme continues to meet the needs of our members and demonstrates the airports' commitment to delivering the objectives in the CART Take-Off guidance. It enables airports to demonstrate to passengers, staff, regulators, and governments that they are prioritizing health and safety in a measurable manner while also ensuring harmonization between ICAO global guidance and industry implementation.

Moving forward, governments and industry regulators will need to ensure that any new processes that they require airports to introduce are reviewed in line with changing data and medical evidence and ensure that they remain aligned with those deployed through other modes of transport and the wider society.

The world is changing fast and, while the pandemic's impact on the industry has been far greater than any crisis we had previously experienced, the aviation industry has not lost sight of our top priority: ensuring the highest level of safety and security for passengers and operations.

Safety remains a top priority, and a safe and secure aviation system is crucial to the global recovery. Each stakeholder has a role to play in the end-to-end operation and to ensure an overall high level of safety performance. Airports, as infrastructure providers, have to ensure a high level of availability and reliability of the airport system. A good example of this is the new ICAO Global Reporting Format for runway condition assessment and reporting which will be applicable as of 4 November this year. It has taken many years to come to a globally harmonized format for reporting runway conditions, and should lead to a reduction in runway excursions, one of the most frequent types of accident today. These types of coordinated and harmonized approaches are critical to keep our industry safe and running smoothly.

As we gear up towards recovery, it will be critical to keep focused on the safety performance of the aviation system. All segments of the industry have been subjected to lower levels of operations for over a year, with many of the operational staff on long-term absence or operating on reduced shifts and frequencies. Due to this reduced activity, personnel may not have the same confidence, reflexes and ease when returning to operations at a higher level of intensity.

The successful recovery and resumption of global air transport operations relies significantly on the technical and managerial skills of airport safety professionals and airport civil aviation regulators, and on their capacity to innovate in the face of the many challenges now confronting our sector and the societies and industries it serves.

As in the past, strong leadership and a renewed collaborative effort amongst all industry segments will be key to ensure safe operations for all. To this end, ACI affirms its commitment towards safety to its members and aviation partners and will continue to participate in activities that serve to promote and improve operational safety and managerial excellence of airports worldwide.

The current crisis has made it clear how vulnerable the aviation industry can be to external shocks, and, without doubt, the long-term survival of the aviation sector will also heavily depend on the ability to reset to a more sustainable model that meets the demands of the climate emergency.

As climate change and the need for sustainable development moves up the political agenda, now more than ever we need to show that aviation is part of the solution, and not part of the problem. ACI has taken a leadership role in developing a long-term carbon goal, and its Long-Term Carbon Goals study is a reflection of our member's commitment to meet the Net Zero Carbon by 2050 goal and the airport community's dedication in leading the industry in taking real and meaningful action.

The future of aviation depends on our commitment to the cause of sustainability and ACI will continue to work with the global aviation sector and stakeholders so that we can be a strong part of the solution.

It is important to note that “the normal” before the pandemic had its challenges that have not gone away. We do not shy away from the role aviation must play in addressing the climate emergency but it is important to highlight the considerable and measurable efforts of the aviation industry in making flying more efficient and more sustainable are recognized. ACI has encouraged airports to keep climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience as key parts of their strategies and recovery plans and identify opportunities to ‘build back better’ by keeping sustainability and resilience at the core of their recovery strategies.

Climate change remains the greatest challenge facing the world and it will require worldwide collaboration and action. The recovery from COVID-19 offers us an opportunity to show global industry leadership in making the whole industry more resilient than ever. The pandemic has shown how important timely actions are to address a crisis and delaying our efforts to reduce emissions today means more ambitious targets and potentially growth limiting actions will be required in future.

While ACI is dedicated to advancing the collective interests of the world’s airports and the communities they serve, we believe that the best way to do this is through cooperation with our partners. The next few years will be crucial in the battle against this historic crisis. We must continue the effort of international solidarity and collaboration, which will be essential for the safe, secure, and sustainable restart and recovery of the aviation sector.

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