

June 2020

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGING

Airline Schedule Changes

Suggested Industry Standards for Airlines,
Travel Agencies and GDSs

Created by the Irregular Operations and
Schedule Changes Focus Group,
part of ARC's Debit Memo Working Group



ARC

Introduction

In air travel, unexpected schedule changes, weather disruptions and logistical issues are inevitable. The travel industry is complex, and it will always need to navigate unexpected changes. It's important for all the organizations in the air travel ecosystem to create an environment of clear communication and consistent processes to support travelers during these scenarios.

The Irregular Operations and Schedule Changes Focus Group, part of ARC's Debit Memo Working Group, has developed a set of recommendations to help create more consistency and efficiency surrounding irregular operations.

These best practices are mutually beneficial for companies across the travel industry, creating more consistent process and policy standards for both airlines and travel agencies. They are intended to:

- Create consistency
- Establish standardization that results in improved efficiencies
- Reduce operational costs
- Increase customer satisfaction and retention

Irregular operations represent a critical moment in the customer experience. The way an airline schedule change is managed and communicated can make or break a traveler's trip. This can also have an enduring impact on a customer's relationship with an airline, agency or travel management company (TMC). Handled well, a schedule change can be an exceptional customer experience that builds trust and loyalty.

This document reflects recommendations based on feedback and collaboration between several U.S. and global travel agencies, airlines, global distribution systems (GDSs) and ARC. These best practices are recommendations and are not considered to be a mandate of any kind. They are intended to serve as a tool for airlines and travel agencies to create greater clarity and enhanced communication, ultimately creating a positive experience for the traveler.

This document does not create any type of legal agreement between or among any airline, travel agency, GDS, ARC, or any other relevant person or entity. Nothing in this document is intended to be mandatory or binding upon any person or entity, and no person or entity will be subject to any type of liability or legal enforcement related to compliance or non-compliance with these guidelines. ARC makes no representations and grants no warranties, express or implied, with regard to this document or its contents, including any representation or warranty concerning quality, condition, performance, non-infringement, commercial utility, merchantability, or fitness of the document or its contents for a particular purpose. This document may be updated from time to time at the discretion of ARC.

Table of Contents

Section 1: Overview of Airline Schedule Changes

- 1.1 Reasons for Schedule Changes
- 1.2 Degree of Change or Level of Impact

Section 2: Recommended Industry-Standard Definitions

- 2.1 Involuntary Changes Based on “Time to Departure”
- 2.2 Exception Events
- 2.3 Degree of Impact to Customer
- 2.4 GDS Bookings: Types of Segment or Passenger Name Record (PNR)
- 2.5 Booking Inventory Code
- 2.6 Multiple Airports in a Single City or Area
- 2.7 Journey Type

Section 3: GDS Communication of Changes

- 3.1 Consistency in Communication for GDS Bookings: Communicate via GDS at the Segment Level
- 3.2 Identify Specific Type of Uncancelled Segment (HX) Status
- 3.3 Partially Used Interline PNR, Validating Carrier Not Present
- 3.4 Consistency in Preference of Control
- 3.5 Customer Contact Information

Section 4: Planned Schedule Changes – Managing Customer Expectations Around Re-Protection and Refunds

- 4.1 Empowering Agencies: Policy and Process Accessibility
- 4.2 Empowering Agencies: Allowing for Flexibility
- 4.3 Degree of Change Allowances
- 4.4 Re-Accommodation Flexibility Recommendations
- 4.5 Revalidation, Reissue and Refund Procedure

Section 5: Recommended Industry-Standard Definitions

- 5.1 Airline Websites: Empowering the Customer to Self-Service

Section 6: Managing Unique Situations

- 6.1 Downgrades in Cabin
- 6.2 Local Minimum Connect Time Changes, Not Communicated Via Normal ASC Processing

Section 7: Customer Experience

- 7.1 Setting Customer Expectations
- 7.2 Resources for Passengers and Travel Agencies
- 7.3 Passenger Notification of Schedule Changes and IROPs

Section 8: Airline Debit Memo (ADM) Processing

- 8.1 Clear and Available Published Policies
- 8.2 Changes in Policy
- 8.3 Minor Administrative Errors
- 8.4 Incorrect Waiver Code Placement (Administrative Error)
- 8.5 Waiver Code Placement and Negotiated Rate Code Displacement
- 8.6 Character Limits for Waiver Code Placement in “End” Field
- 8.7 Incorrect Booking Class (RBD) Used for Re-protection
- 8.8 Increasing Visibility for Airline ADM Auditors
- 8.9 Codeshare and Interline PNRs – Ownership of Policy
- 8.10 Verbal Authorization
- 8.11 PNR Segment Update
- 8.12 Use of Passive Segments (BK/GK/YK)

Summary



Section 1: Overview of Airline Schedule Changes (ASCs)

An airline schedule change refers to any modification to a passenger’s scheduled flight itinerary at any point prior to flight departure. These changes are not initiated by the traveler and could impact just one flight or the entire end-to-end journey.

A change can occur for a variety of reasons including (but not limited to) some of the common scenarios listed below.

1.1 Reasons for Schedule Changes

Schedule changes can occur for a variety of reasons, including (but not limited to):

Airline Market Supply and Demand

- Market demand requires more or fewer flights per day/week
- Market demand requires larger/smaller airplane equipment
- Market demand requires complete cancellation of route due to low demand
- Competitive landscape (airline domination)
- Market shift (seasonal change)
- Gate availability (airlines shifting gates, not under airline control)
- Change in marketing airline
- Overbooked flights
- Expecting larger aircraft changes to a smaller aircraft

Airport Conditions (IROP)

- Closure or reduced capacity due to construction, flood, fire, work stoppage, terrorism, other emergency
- Political unrest, unsafe to travel, travel advisory in effect
- Must file a new flight path for various reasons (e.g., wind patterns)
- Connecting feeder flight change that no longer meets minimum connect time (MCT)
- Emergency landings and potential impact

Inclement Weather (IROP)

- Delays or cancellations due to heavy rain, fog, snow/sleet/ice, high wind
- May impact ability to take off or land, causing downstream delays, cancellations and missed connections

Airline Crew Availability (IROP)

- Insufficient or late-arriving pilots or flight attendants

Aircraft Problems (IROP)

- Interior or Exterior Electrical, Structural, Mechanical, Ground maintenance, or other
- Emergency landings due to mechanical/may delay downline flights
- Medical issues/emergency

Airline Operations and Financials

- Bankruptcy
- Complete cessation
- Merger

Other

- Daylight Savings time (can vary by time zones)

1.2 Degree of Change or Level of Impact

This refers to the specific impact or change to an individual flight that is generally initiated by the operating airline. An ASC could impact an individual flight or journey in one or more of the following ways:

- Flight number change
- Departure time change
- Arrival time change
- Date change
- Change in inventory
- Change in class upgrade
- Change in class downgrade
- Change in equipment
- Change in origin city or airport (common-rated/sister cities)
- Change in destination city or airport
- Change in connection routing
- Nonstop to a direct or connecting flight or vice versa
- Change of gauge
- Change in operating airline
- Change in local airport minimum connecting times that result in missed connection of existing flights*
- Customer initiated change with the airline/airline communicates via GDS

Section 2: Recommended Industry-Standard Definitions

2.1 Involuntary Changes based on “Time to Departure”

Various airlines use different definitions for different types of schedule changes, which typically break down into two primary categories.

The ASC Focus Group recommends the following standardized descriptors and definitions:

- **Irregular Operation (IROP):** An involuntary change to the passenger’s schedule that occurs within 72 hours of scheduled departure
- **Planned Schedule Change (SKCHG):** An involuntary change to the passenger’s schedule that occurs more than 72 hours from schedule departure. Generally, but not always, airlines provide this information at least 30 days prior to departure.

2.2 Exception Events

There are also “involuntary events” that may result in an IROP or SKCHG, when an airline may offer options in advance to mitigate or limit potential IROP impact. There are several descriptors in the market today, such as “travel notice,” “flex event” and “exception policy.”

The ASC Focus Group recommends the following standardized descriptor and definition:

- **Exception Event (EXCEP):** A specific event that has the potential to impact schedules, but has not yet done so
- This could include inclement weather; natural disasters; industrial, political or terrorist incidents; etc

2.3 Degree of Impact to Customer

Every airline has a different definition for “degree of change,” which is likely what is used to determine the options offered to impacted customers. Having so many definitions and levels makes it challenging for agencies who service ASC-impacted passenger name records (PNRs) for hundreds of airlines. It can also be a challenge for airlines as they work with their various interline and codeshare partners.

Consistent, standard descriptors will aid in effective training and comprehension for agency and airline staff, as well as support ASC automation for more efficient processing and additional cost savings for what can be a very expensive transaction.

Note: This recommendation relates only to the flexibility allowance for rebooking. It does not relate to the timeframe in which an agency or airline determines when a customer needs to be notified: That is a business decision for the agency or airline to make.

The ASC Focus Group recommends the following standardized descriptors and definitions to help quantify the "degree of change" and determine the level of flexibility to be granted to the passenger for re-protection or refund.

Minor Impact

- Flight number only change
- Inventory only, same cabin
- Impact of X minutes to arrival time or departure
- Upgrade to higher cabin
- Change to marketing carrier

Major Impact

- "Minor Impact" plus 1 or more minutes to arrival or departure
- Change to departure/arrival airport
- Change to connecting city or routing (potential travel document impact)
- Change in travel date
- Change creates a misconnection
- Change in equipment
- Change to operating carrier
- Cancellation – no protection provided
- Downgrade in cabin

2.4 GDS Bookings: Types of Segment or Passenger Name Record (PNR)

Airlines have varying ways of describing different segment or PNR types. The makeup of the segment or PNR type may determine the specific re-protection options available to the passenger who is impacted by an ASC. Common descriptors and definitions include:

- **True, Prime, Real, Pure:** Marketed and operated by same airline
- **Codeshare:** Marketed by one airline and operated by another
- **Interline:** Multiple marketing and operating airlines, or a combination of the above

The ASC Focus Group recommends the following standardized descriptors and definitions to help quantify the "PNR or Segment Type"

- **True:** Marketed and operated by the same airline
- **Codeshare:** Marketed by one airline and operated by another
- **Interline:** Multiple marketing and operating airlines, or a combination of true and codeshare

2.5 Booking Inventory Code

All fares require that a specific inventory "alpha character" is used when selling space from an availability display that matches the ticketed fare. There are multiple terms used to define this "letter" in the market today:

- Reservation Booking Designator (RBD)
- Class of Service (RBD)
- Booking Code (BC)
- Inventory Code (IC)

The ASC Focus Group recommends using “reservation booking designator (RBD)” when referencing booking designator/inventory code(s).

2.6 Multiple Airports in a Single City or Area

In large metropolitan areas, airport codes are often named after the airport itself instead of the city it serves, while another code is reserved for the city or metropolitan area itself. For example:

- “NYC” could be used to describe the area covered by four airports: JFK, EWR, LGA and HPN.
- “LON” could be used to describe the area covered by six airports: LHR, LGW, LCY, STN, SEN and LTN.

In some cases, these other area airports may be considered equivalent destinations, and passengers may be allowed to use them reciprocally for protection in the event of an ASC, provided service is offered by that airline or possibly a ticketing partner.

Airlines may use various terms for this scenario:

- Multi-airport
- Common rated
- Sister city
- Co-terminal city

The ASC Focus Group recommends using the term “Common Rated” for a city for metropolitan area that utilizes multiple airports.

It is important to note that some airlines, for the purpose of ASC re-protection, will provide authorization to re-protect utilizing an alternate airport within a certain distance radius rather than using any of the terms above. (For example, “OK to protect at an alternate airport within a 300-mile radius.”)

2.7 Journey Type

A “journey” is generally used to describe a passenger’s journey from origin to destination. It could also be used to reflect the passenger’s entire itinerary within a given PNR or on a single ticket. For the purpose of ASCs, this document examines it from both a PNR/ticket view and from a directional journey, segment-level view (notably, where an ASC impacts only the outbound or inbound flight segment(s), not the entire PNR).

The ASC Focus Group recommends using the following standardized descriptors when describing a journey type:

- **One-Way:** When the passenger travels from origin to destination (e.g., JFK-LON).
- **Round Trip:** When the traveler starts from one point and comes back to the same point using the same route (e.g., JFK-LON, LON-JFK).
- **Around the World:** The journey in which the traveler travels around the world and crosses the International Date Line, visiting multiple places (e.g., JFK-SYD-HKG-DEL-LON-JFK).
- **Open Jaw:** When the traveler goes from one place to another by air, from there, goes to a third place by other means of travel, and then takes a flight back to where they started (e.g., JFK to LAX by air, LAX to SFO by car, SFO to JFK by air).
- **Circle Trip:** When the traveler starts from one location, stops over (S/O) in multiple cities and comes back to same location where he started (e.g., JFK-LON (S/O)-DEL (S/O)-JFK).

The ASC Focus Group also recommends that the airline should always look at the **entire directional journey** (inclusive of connecting flights) when providing re-protection, not just at segment level. Limited re-protection could result in later missed connections.

Example:

XX123Y 15OCT T SEAORD*SS1 657A 1254P /
XX456Y 15OCT T ORDMIA*SS1 200P 608P /

A schedule change on XX123 now has flight departing at 0750A, creating a missed connection at ORD.

When considering re-protection, consider the entire SEA to MIA journey and protect on alternate flight for the entire journey as close to original flight times as possible.

XX987Y 15OCT T SEADFW*SS1 730A 133P
XX654Y 15OCT T DFWMIA*SS1 235P 623P

Section 3: GDS Communication of Changes

3.1 Consistency in Communication for GDS Bookings: Communicate via GDS at the Segment Level

Not all airlines will communicate IROPs or ASCs via the GDS at the segment level. Some may:

- Provide details in Other Service Information (OSI) and/or Special Service Request (SSR) remarks
- Post bulletins to their website
- Send email blasts to agencies that subscribe to notifications
- Send agency-specific communications and instructions to appropriate contacts at the agency
- Call the agency for each PNR impacted

In some cases, the task of identifying impacted PNRs for a specific scenario (market reduction, for example) is up to the agency. The risk of debit memos is increased in these cases.

The overall volume of IROPs and ASCs across hundreds of airlines can be high, making it impossible for agencies to forecast and accurately plan for these changes from a workforce perspective. Much like airlines, many agencies rely on automation to work through the hundreds, if not thousands, of schedule changes that are received on a weekly basis, as high volume would be unmanageable using only manual processes. Additionally, there are often many travel-impacting events happening in the world or with a given airline.

The ASC Focus Group recommends that IROP and schedule changes (SKCHG) should always be communicated via the GDSs at the segment level using standard queue placement and segment status code rules. This will increase efficiency in managing the processing of impacted PNRs, whether managed via automation or manually.

3.2 Identify Specific Type of Uncancelled Segment (HX) Status

Uncancelled segment (HX) status is a seemingly generic status that is used to indicate that a change has been made to the flight segment(s) outside of the agency PNR by the airline directly. The updated flight information is not provided, so from an agency perspective, it would appear that the flight may have been cancelled, even though that may not be the case. In all cases, to ensure the traveler is aware of the change, the agency must contact the airline and/or the traveler to determine any action that may be required. Furthermore, if the agent does not take an action to update the PNR, the agency is subject to a debit memo.

More often than not, the initial action was initiated by the passenger to the airline directly, and they are fully aware of the change. Unfortunately, the lack of information provided in the PNR creates a disproportionate amount of manual effort in managing HX-impacted PNRs. It is also currently impossible to automate a resolution.

Scenarios that could result in an HX segment being generated by the airline:

- Passenger called the airline directly to make a change
- Passenger was a no-show
- Seat upgrade
- Cabin upgrade
- Unticketed PNR (cancelled due to TTL expiration)
- Dupe ticket

The ASC Focus Group recommends that airlines add SSR remarks to the PNR to inform the agent of necessary next steps. Including the following information would help reduce the amount of time spent managing these changes and improve customer communication.

Example:

- Flight Details/Ticket Number
- Reason
 - » HX ZZ1234Y12JAN - DUE TO IROP
 - » HX ZZ1234Y12JAN - DUE TO UPGRADE (cabin and seat upgrades)
 - » HX ZZ1234Y12JAN - DUE TO CUSTOMER CTC CXR DIRECT VIA TE
 - » HX ZZ1234Y12JAN - DUE TO CUSTOMER CTC CXR DIRECT VIA WEBSITE
 - » HX TKT123-1231231230 - DUE TO NO SHOW
 - » HX ZZ1234Y12JAN - DUE TO NO TICKET ISSUED
 - » HX ZZ1234Y12JAN – DUE TO DUPE WITH [PNR]

3.3 Partially Used Interline PNR, Validating Carrier Not Present

For a partially flown PNR where the validating carrier is no longer the marketing carrier for any trip segments (regardless of operating carrier), system limitations may inhibit the reissuance of a ticket if the validating carrier is no longer present in the PNR.

The ASC Focus Group recommends that the validating carrier's e-ticket database should support the ability to locate the PNR, even when the validating carrier is no longer present within the PNR.

3.4 Consistency in Preference of Control

Some airlines prefer to manage PNRs for any involuntary changes within a certain period of time prior to departure. This can range anywhere from 24 hours to 7 days before departure.

Notably in IROP situations, changes occur rapidly. Schedules are in an ongoing state of flux, and the GDS may not always have or be able to display the most up-to-date information at a PNR level or availability level. Additionally, having multiple entities working in the same PNR may cause mixed messages in the GDS, creating possible negative impacts to the PNR. Lastly, the airline may have additional flexibility in re-protection options for IROP-impacted PNRs (e.g., overriding reservation booking designator (RBD), using other airlines to protect).

The ASC Focus Group recommends that airlines take responsibility of managing involuntary changes (IROPs) directly with the customer when departure is within 72 hours – most notably, when departure is within 24 hours and where the customer has checked in (the agency may no longer have control once checked in). Additionally, it would be extremely beneficial if airline websites could offer the ability for passengers (regardless of booking channel) to manage IROP impacts themselves. Airlines should allow passengers to view, shop, rebook/reissue or cancel/refund online or within the airline app.

3.5 Customer Contact Information

The Industry Agents' Handbook (IAH) states that agencies should add customer phone and email contact information via SSR messaging in the PNR at time of creation.

Note: GDSs have advised that SSR YY information correctly added to PNRs is sent to all airlines in the PNR, so all airlines will have access to that information and can notify passengers impacted by an IROP.

The ASC Focus Group recommends that agencies ensure accurate passenger contact information (phone and email) is available to operating carriers. This will enable them to effectively communicate to agency customers in the event of an IROP situation. Airlines should post any requirement for this information in their online airline ticketing policy, as this is a standard location for agencies to find airline-specific requirements.



Section 4: Planned Schedule Changes – Managing Customer Expectations Around Re-Protection and Refund

4.1 Empowering Agencies: Policy and Process Accessibility

The ASC Focus Group recommends that airlines provide an online repository where current involuntary schedule change policies and processes are posted and can be accessed by travel agencies 24/7. These policies should include:

- Step-by-step process on how travel agencies should manage impacted PNRs, allowing for clear and efficient handling of planned schedule changes
- Clear descriptions of processes for documenting PNR, waiver code placement, etc. when processing related reissues or refunds
- Empowering policies that allow for first-touch resolution and potential automation
- “Change control” management to identify most current policy as well as archived policies, aiding in the research of debit memos or customer complaints
- Open access to information without the need for login credentials

4.2 Empowering Agencies: Allowing for Flexibility

Customers who purchase travel online want the ability to manage their purchases without delay or having to call into a call center and talk to someone. Allowing agencies to assist schedule-change-impacted customers without delay or having to call or email an airlines will enable first touch/call resolution, which will aid in operational cost reduction, reduced error and improved customer satisfaction. This benefits both agencies and the airlines

Furthermore, this enables agencies to build automation around the re-accommodation process, further improving efficiency and enhancing the customer experience.

4.3 Degree of Change Allowances

The ASC Focus Group makes the following recommendations for empowering agents to manage planned schedule changes in the most efficient manner possible. It recommends that agents are not required to obtain pre-authorization from the airline either by phone or email. The following recommendations assume that the validating airline is the “policy owner.”

Airlines should provide specific instructions for when an agency is allowed to make re-accommodation changes, or when they are allowed to refund. If the impact is minimal, it should be clearly noted that changes are not allowed, as the airline does not expect re-booking to be required or necessary. Airlines are encouraged to clearly outline the parameters that will fit the majority of scenarios. If situations arise that fall outside these allowances, agents can then contact the airline for consideration of alternate solutions.

Recommended parameters that would not allow for re-booking or refund (Minor)

- Change in flight number only, with no other changes
- Minimal time change: Impact to departure or arrival time of X minutes* or less
- Upgrade to higher cabin
- Change to marketing airline (operating airline is the same)

Recommended parameters that would allow for re-booking or refund (Major)

- Time change: Impact to departure or arrival time of X minutes* or more
- Provided protection results in a missed connection
- Change to departure or arrival date
- Provided protection results in increased flight segments
- Provided protection requires an unacceptable change of equipment (e.g., jet to prop)
- Provided protection requires an unacceptable change in operating airline
- Flight is cancelled and there is no acceptable option

*The airline would determine the number of minutes for X. The important thing is that something is defined and not left open for interpretation. This will result in delayed resolution, calls/e-mails to Airlines and potentially ADMs.

4.4 Re-Accommodation Flexibility Recommendations

Key Terms:

- **Prime:** Marketed and operated by validating airline (XX*XX)
- **Prime OAL:** Marketed and operated by the same "other airline" (XX*OA)
- **Codeshare:** Marketed by validating airline/operated by same OA (OA*OA)
- **OAL Codeshare:** Marketed by OA/operated by another airline

Scenario 1: Prime PNR. Contains only segments that are marketed and operated by the validating airline.

Impacted segments may be rebooked as follows:

- **Reservation Booking Class (RBD) options:**
 - » **Option 1:** Rebook to alternate Prime flight(s) the original RBD for same origin and destination (O/D).
 - » **Option 2:** Rebook to alternate Prime flight(s) in the same cabin for the same O/D.
 - » **Option 3:** Rebook to an alternate validating airline marketed/OA operated (codeshare) in original RBD for same O/D.
- **Date of Travel options:**
 - » **Option 1:** Rebook to alternate Prime flight(s) on the same day as original flight(s).
 - » **Option 2:** Rebook to alternate Prime flight(s) three days before or three days after original flight.
 - » **Option 3:** If service is not daily, rebook to alternate Prime flight(s) on the closest available day to original flight.
- **Routing change allowance, keeping same O/D**
 - » Allow change in connecting city.
 - » Allow non-stop to connecting flight or connecting flight to non-stop.
 - » Allow alternate airport in what is considered a multi-airport city.
 - » Allow alternate airport within a 300-mile radius of the original airport.
- **Maintain original length of trip if requested by passenger.** Define specific parameters for alternate flight (could be same as above or more restrictive)
 - » OK to change by same number of days as original impact.
 - » New flight must be booked in original RBD only, with same O/D

Scenario 2: Codeshare PNR. All segments are marketed by the validating airline but not necessarily operated by the validating airline.

- **Reservation Booking Class (RBD) options:**
 - » **Option 1:** Rebook to alternate codeshare flight(s) using same marketing and operating airline in the original RBD for same O/D.
 - » **Option 2:** Rebook to alternate codeshare flight(s) using the same marketing and operating airline in the same cabin for the same O/D (notably if joint business partner or alliance partner).
 - » **Option 3:** Rebook to alternate Prime (validating airline) flight(s) in original RBD for same O/D where applicable.
 - » **Option 4:** Rebook to Prime (validating airline) flights in same cabin for same O/D where applicable.
- **Date of travel options:**
 - » **Option 1:** Rebook on the same day as original flight(s)
 - » **Option 2:** Rebook three days before or three days after original flight.
 - » **Option 3:** If service is not daily, rebook on the closest available day to original flight.
- **Routing change allowance, keeping same O/D:**
 - » Allow alternate airport that is considered a multi-airport city.
 - » Allow alternate airport within a 300-mile radius of original airport.
 - » Allow change in connecting city.
 - » Allow non-stop to connecting flight or connecting flight to non-stop.
- **Maintain original length of trip if requested by passenger:**
 - » Define specific parameters for alternate flight (could be same as above or more restrictive).
 - » OK to change by same number of days as original impact.
 - » New flight must be booked in original RBD only, same O/D

Scenario 3: Interline PNR. Combination of segments that are marketed by validating airline and other airline (OA) and where segments could be operated by the validating airline or OA. Could possibly combine True, True OA, and Codeshare or OA Codeshare segments

- **Reservation Booking Class (RBD) options:**
 - » If impact is to Prime validating airline segments or true codeshare segments marketed by the validating carrier, follow above recommendations for Prime or Prime Codeshare.
 - » **If impact is to OA marketed segments:**
 - **Option 1:** Rebook to alternate OA flight(s) using same marketing and operating airline in the original RBD for same O/D.
 - **Option 2:** Rebook to alternate Prime (validating airline) flights in corresponding RBD or same cabin for same O/D where applicable. (Conversion chart will be needed.)
- **Date of travel options:**
 - » **Option 1:** Rebook on the same day as original flight(s).
 - » **Option 2:** Rebook three days before or three days after original flight.
 - » **Option 3:** If service is not daily, rebook on the closest available day to original flight.
- **Routing change allowance, keeping same O/D:**
 - » Allow alternate airport that is considered a multi-airport city.
 - » Allow alternate airport within a 300-mile radius of original airport.
 - » Allow change in connecting city.
 - » Allow non-stop to connecting flight or connecting flight to non-stop.
- **Maintain original length of trip if requested by passenger:**
 - » Define specific parameters for alternate flight (could be same as above or more restrictive).
 - » OK to change by same number of days as original impact.
 - » New flight must be booked for alternate flight using same marketing/operating airline(s) in original RBD only, same O/D.
- **Alternate destination:**
 - » In the event passenger opts not to fly due to time constraints or missed events, etc.
 - » Where a refund is not applicable, allow the passenger to use the value of the ticket at a later time for an alternate itinerary booked on the original validating airline without imposing a change fee.
 - May consider a "book by" date.

4.5 Revalidation, Reissue and Refund Procedure

Revalidation Process

Many airlines have opted to implement an automatic revalidation process whereby, for certain minor degrees of change, their automation automatically revalidates the ticket so the agency simply needs to accept and clean up the PNR. As agencies in the U.S. do not currently have the ability to revalidate tickets, this is a huge help to them in reducing the number of reissues that are tied to involuntary schedule changes, as well as the risk of debit memos.

The ASC Focus Group recommends that airlines consider allowing agencies to revalidate. It also recommends that agencies check the airline policy carefully to see if they have some level of revalidation capabilities.

Reissue Process

For those PNRs that require manual rebooking and ticket reissuance, in addition to providing empowering re-booking policies as outlined above, it would be helpful if airlines could also move to standard PNR reissue waiver documentation to help internal audit teams quickly identify these as reissues as a result of an involuntary schedule change. By providing standard PNR documentation, agencies would be more efficient at managing the PNR, reducing errors related to potentially using the wrong waiver code or incorrectly placing the waiver code. It would also enable agencies to automate the rebooking process.

Furthermore, the industry would benefit from one standard, designated place for the waiver information to be placed in the PNR where airline auditors could always look for it. This would also reduce errors and debit memos, also allowing for greater automation.

The ASC Focus Group recommends that airlines provide one standard waiver code that allows for the reissuance of planned-schedule-change-impacted PNRs as outlined above. This code should be documented in the airline's published policy and used for all planned-schedule-change-impacted PNRs that require a reissue.

Code: SKCHG XX1234 DDMMM

Where "XX" is the carrier code first impacted by the change

Placement: Endorsement Field

Note: This could truncate existing verbiage

Refund Process for Major Schedule Changes

If the customer is not amenable to the rebooking options offered above or the customer opts to cancel, the customer may be entitled to a refund. In an effort to ensure timely refunds as outlined by the DOT, it is recommended that airlines allow agencies to process refunds via the GDS using established, standard refund waiver documentation in the PNR.

It is important to note that in an ARC refund transaction, placing a waiver code in the "Endorsement" field or "Tour Code" field will NOT transmit on a refund transaction processed in the GDS. However, there is a "Waiver Code" field that is offered by major GDS systems (Amadeus, Sabre, Travelport, etc.) that accepts up to 15 characters and, when added to the GDS refund transactions, will place the waiver code on the Refund Exchange Notice (REN) in the airline's Carrier Accounting Tape (CAT) file. This feature negates the additional steps of having to manually add the waiver information in IAR.

Note that this is not feasible for agencies that:

- Do not provide IAR access to front-line agents
- Are implementing automated solutions

The ASC Focus Group recommends that airlines provide one standard Waiver Code that allows for the refund of unacceptable, involuntary schedule changes as outlined above. This code should be documented in the airline's published policy and used for all planned-schedule-change-impacted PNRs.

The ASC Focus Group also recommends standard placement of these waiver codes in the "Waiver Code" field as part of the GDS refund process.

Code: SKCHG XX 1234

Where XX is the carrier code first impacted by the change

Placement: "Waiver Code" field

15-character limit



Section 5: Irregular Operations — Managing Customer Expectations

5.1 Airline Websites: Empowering the Customer to Self-Service

The ASC Focus Group recommends that, where an airline provides an opportunity for passengers to manage bookings online, provide options for them to view, shop and reissue, or to cancel/refund (where allowed) in the case of involuntary changes that occur within 72 hours of departure. This will provide the passenger with flexibility to self-service for faster resolution, as well as to help reduce the number of inbound calls to agencies and airlines during high call volume situations.

Additionally, the ASC Focus Group recommends that airlines manage IROP situations that occur within 24 hours (at minimum, but up to 72 hours prior to departure), as airlines may have more leverage with other airlines or additional re-protection options not available to agencies.

For those situations where the agency is managing the re-protection, airlines should provide the ability for agencies to open the ticket status to allow changes to be made on the checked-in flight.

Airline re-accommodation or refund policies for agencies as they relate to IROP situations should vary only slightly from the Planned Schedule Change policy. Generally, they would allow greater flexibility, including:

- Increased RBD flexibility in same cabin or potentially into other cabins
- Expanded allowance of alternate travel dates (e.g., within 7 days of original date)
- Protection on another airline (generally only airlines can manage this)
- Empower agencies to rebook to alternate destination on validating airline without a change fee (perhaps to a common rated airport or within a certain “larger” radius of original airport), and potentially without add-collect, provided booked same day or within X days
- Allow for refunds



Section 6: Managing Unique Situations

6.1 Downgrades in Cabin

Sometimes a schedule change or IROP results in the passenger being downgraded from a premium-cabin seat. Many airlines have special handling procedures for this type of event and would prefer to manage these situations directly with the passenger.

Treatment of each scenario is managed based on multiple criteria points.

The ASC Focus Group recommends that, as part of standard IROP and schedule change policy documentation, airlines have a specific call-out for this scenario as to the preferred method of handling. (Whether direct through the airline or via an agency.)

If the airline allows agencies to manage cabin downgrades, provide details on options that agents can provide to impacted customers.

- Allow for rebooking to an alternate flight where seats are available in preferred cabin, free of charge
- If customer opts to travel in the lower-class cabin, allow agent to refund the difference in fare based on the difference between actual fare paid and lower class fare available in historical pricing from date of original purchase. Providing a refund based on “today’s” lower class fare is generally is not an equitable offer.

6.2 Local Minimum Connect Time Changes (MCT), Not Communicated Via Normal ASC Processing

Today, minimum connect time (MCT) changes are not processed through the ASC queue process. Therefore, agents do not have visibility into these updates, especially after the ticket has been issued.

The following scenarios often take place:

- Local Minimum Connect Time (MCT) was correct at time of purchase per GDS filing
- MCT changed at some point but the agency is not proactively notified via ASC process so is unaware that there is a problem
- Potential negative impacts:
 - » Customer misses a flight and has a negative experience
 - » Customer’s relationship with the agency or airline is damaged
 - » Agency is issued a debit memo due to the airline’s perception that an invalid connection time (CT) was booked.

The ASC Focus Group recommends that airlines monitor existing bookings for impact and process connecting airport time changes via normal ASC processing to advise agency of any change and need to re-protect. Additionally, before issuing a debit memo for an MCT error, airlines should check to see if there were any local airport MCT changes that occurred from time of ticket issuance.

Note: Agencies don't have access to this information, and airlines may not, either. ARC will work with participating airlines to determine how best to obtain this information.



Section 7: Customer Experience

7.1 Setting Customer Expectations

The ASC Focus Group recommends that both airlines and agencies set customer expectations around the potential of an involuntary schedule change at time of booking.

Providing this information should lessen the “surprise and stress” factor and provide assurance that, even if there is an unexpected change, there are policies and processes in place to help work through the situation and get the customer on their way.

The following information can prove helpful for passengers:

- Link to conditions of carriage in booking path, confirmation documents and verbally during booking
- Highlight the fact that schedules are subject to change
- Link to FAQ on website regarding schedule change information and reasons why they might happen

The ASC Focus Group also recommends that airlines and agencies set up FAQ pages for customers, detailing what to expect if they are impacted by an involuntary change. This information should be easily accessible from the booking path and homepage and certainly as a link off any confirmation or pre-trip email sent to passengers.

This information should be referenced in instances where customers book with an agent via chat, phone or email.

7.2 Resources for Passengers and Travel Agencies

Travel agencies and airlines can provide many helpful resources to ensure customers have realistic expectations for their travel experience. The ASC Focus Group recommends that organizations provide information around the following:

- **Proper Documentation:** Don't end the trip before it starts! Ensure the passenger is aware of any and all travel documentation that is needed for their entire journey, including connecting points.
- **General Information:** Provide context as to why schedule changes happen.
- **Mechanical Issues:** Ensure customers understand that airlines don't have extra planes available at every airport to swap out – and why.
- **Crew Availability:** Ensure customers understand that airlines don't have additional flight crew readily available at every airport to fill in for missing crew members. Explain legal restrictions on number of hours that can be worked by pilots and crew, etc.
- **Airline Responsibility to Protect or Provide an Amenity:** Provide links to airline conditions of carriage and other information that would be useful for the passenger, including when the airline is required to provide

compensation, meal vouchers, hotels, etc. For example, many passengers expect that if a flight is delayed due to rain or snow, the airline is required to feed and house them. This is not necessarily true.

- **Airline Website IROP Status and Rebooking Options:** If the airline allows customers to self-service for re-protection on IROP, let the customer know. They would likely appreciate the ability to resolve the issue quickly and efficiently without standing in line or waiting on hold to talk to someone.
- **Your Agency Can Help:** Most airlines provide policies for agents to manage planned schedule change re-accommodation in the event the flights offered by the airline are not amenable. Encourage them to call their travel agent. Additionally, in many cases, airlines will not support agency customers unless it is the day of departure. Make sure customers know this.
- **Staff Training:** Make sure airline and travel agency customer service agents are trained on all of the above so as to instill confidence, comfort and trust that the customer will be taken care of in a difficult situation.
- **First Touch/First Call Resolution:** Airlines are encouraged to provide policies that empower agency partners to resolve these situations on the airline's behalf on the first touch or first call with the customer. The quicker the issue can be resolved, the better the customer experience.

7.3 Passenger Notification of Schedule Changes and IROPs

- **How will the customer know?** At the time of booking, ensure passengers are aware of how schedule changes or IROPs will be communicated, either by the agency or the airline.
- **Passenger Contact Information:** It is critical that customers know that their agency is providing pertinent contact information to the airline via the PNR, ensuring that the airline is able to connect with the passenger directly to advise of changes and re-protection options. Agents should always try to obtain a mobile phone number for the passenger if at all possible so the airline can reach them at any point during their trip by phone or SMS.
- **Same-Day Changes:** It is important that the customer knows their agent may not be made aware of same-day changes (IROPs) by the airline. This is because the airline's priority is to re-book those that are impacted. In some cases, the airline may not communicate changes to agencies within three days of departure.
- **Check-In:** It is highly recommended that passengers check in at least 24 hours prior to their flight and provide contact information at that time, even if already provided through their agent.
 - » **At the Airport – IROP and Delay Communication:** Customers should be advised that the DOT requires an announcement to be made every 30 minutes regarding the delay. This is required on the aircraft, as well, and it is mandatory that the aircraft's door remain open.

Section 8: Airline Debit Memo (ADM) Processing

Travel agents often receive airline debit memos (ADMs) for real or perceived errors in exchange transactions resulting from an involuntary change.

Managing ADMs is costly for both airlines and agencies. With more than 200 ARC participating airlines, each with its own process and policy guidelines and content that change over time, it's not surprising that errors take place. This section outlines some of the primary root causes of ADMs, specific to involuntary changes. It also contains recommendations to reduce the occurrence of these ADMs and associated operational costs, as well as ensure consistently positive working relationships between airlines and agencies.

It is important to note that many of these ADM types could be reduced through the implementation of the recommendations already outlined in this document – notably as they relate to clear, concise, consistent and available policies for planned schedule changes, IROPs and exception policies.

8.1 Clear and Available Published Policies

Some airlines do not publish agency policies and processes for managing involuntary changes or provide an avenue for agents to obtain that information. Many times, agents are left to determine how to proceed. This lack of information may lead to incorrect handling and a resulting ADM.

In some cases, policies are published, but they do not provide the level of detail an agent needs to accurately provide re-accommodation to the customer. They also sometimes read as if addressing the passenger, not the agent. Agents are often expected to interpret what the intent of the process or step is. If the agent misinterprets the intent, an ADM may be issued.

Written policies often use language that is specific to a particular airline and may not be readily understood, or could be misinterpreted, and result in an ADM.

The ASC Focus Group encourages airlines to follow the recommendations as outlined in Chapter 5 and provide clear, concise, step-by-step documentation on how agents should manage PNRs that are impacted by an involuntary change. These policies should use standard industry terminology and avoid using internal phrases or references that may not have any meaning to the agency.

8.2 Changes in Policy

Airline policies often change in some manner, generally without notice or any indication of when the policy changed. Depending on the method of policy communication to agencies, it's possible that an agency could be using an outdated version, resulting in ADMs.

The ASC Focus Group recommends that airline policies be communicated with some sort of version control (effective date) clearly indicated. It is also recommended that airlines keep an accessible archive of past versions to allow for future ADM research, benefiting both the airline and the agency.

8.3 Minor Administrative Errors

Depending on what might be going on in the world or within the industry, the volume of PNRs impacted by an involuntary change can be very high. As neither agencies nor airlines can forecast these volumes (notably across hundreds of airline partners), it is nearly impossible to staff for these issues ahead of time.

Agents are often under a tremendous amount of pressure to manage impacted PNRs as quickly as possible. This can lead to minor errors (typos) that have no ill effect on the outcome of the rebooking or negative impact to revenue. These can include:

- Minor typos in a waiver code (e.g., inverted characters, missing characters)
- Using an incorrect waiver code (e.g., using an IROP code instead of SKCHG code)
- Entering an incorrect date or flight number (e.g., typo or out of order)
- Waiver code was truncated due to too many characters (e.g., did not fit in the "Waiver" field, endorsement box (ENDO Box), etc.)

The ASC Focus Group Recommends that airlines take into consideration that, if the policy was followed correctly and the only error was related to an inconsequential error in the waiver code itself, to provide some leeway and do not issue an ADM.

When creating waiver codes, airlines may consider avoiding the use of "0", "O," "1" or "L," which are more likely to be misread than other characters.

If possible, add Other Service Indicator (OSI) comments identifying the "event" for an impacted PNR. This will help redirect the agent to the correct exception policy to use (e.g., OSI Hurricane Jenny or Paris ATC Strike).

8.4 Incorrect Waiver Code Placement (Administrative Error)

In a high-volume situation, an agent may incorrectly place the waiver code into the wrong field (e.g., entered in endorsement box (ENDO Box) instead of the "Tour Code" field).

The ASC Focus Group Recommends airlines take into consideration that, if the policy was followed correctly and the only error was related to the placement of the waiver code itself, provide flexibility and do not issue an ADM.

Airlines are also encouraged to follow standard placement recommendations as outlined in Section 4.5 (Revalidation, Reissue and Refund Procedures). Standardized placement will help reduce errors.

8.5 Waiver Code Placement and Negotiated Rate Code Displacement

Some fares require specific documentation to identify a negotiated fare (e.g., in the “Tour Code” field). If agents are required to add the ASC waiver code for a reissue in the same field as the rate code, it could force the negotiated rate code out of that field altogether. The agency then receives an ADM for not having the proper negotiated fare code on the new ticket.

The ASC Focus Group recommends standard usage of the endorsement box (ENDO Box) for waiver code placement. This will avoid accidental displacement of negotiated rate codes in the “Tour Code/IT” field.

8.6 Character Limits for Waiver Code Placement in "ENDO" Box

While the ASC Focus Group recommends adding reissues to the endorsement box (ENDO Box), airlines should note that this field does have limited space. This means that the addition of an ASC waiver code could truncate the information that was previously input in the endorsement box (ENDO Box).

The ASC Focus Group recommends that airlines do not issue ADMs when an ASC waiver code is placed in the endorsement box (ENDO Box) and where the original content of the endorsement box (ENDO Box) becomes truncated.

8.7 Incorrect Booking Class (RBD) Used for Re-protection

Airlines generally have a specific and unique RBD hierarchy, depending on their fare structure and fare families. It is not easy for agents to ascertain which RBDs belong in which cabin. While agents very much appreciate when a policy indicates “OK to book within same cabin,” they sometimes inadvertently book an RBD that does not belong to that cabin or fare family.

The ASC Focus Group recommends that airlines provide an RBD hierarchy chart within their policy to provide a quick view of which RBDs fall into which cabins. This will help the agency understand the allowable RBDs in any given cabin, resulting in more efficient and accurate resolution.

8.8 Increasing Visibility for Airline ADM Auditors

Airline auditors may not have access to segment-level detail to see a schedule change, so an ADM may be automatically issued, even when a waiver code is present. The burden of proof then lies with the agency to dispute the memo.

The ASC Focus Group recommends that airlines put processes into place whereby ADM audit teams have the necessary visibility and access to validate whether an ASC occurred prior to issuing an ADM. This would save significant time and cost related to the issuance of an ADM and subsequent dispute management by both the airline and agency.

Airlines should work with their ticketing partners to determine a method of communicating ASC impacts to the validating airline to avoid extra research.

Airline audit agents (internal or third party) should be given access to segment-level information or otherwise enabled to verify whether an ASC took place before issuing an ADM. They should also be provided with training and tools (e.g., policy, fare rules, GDS status) to help them ascertain what occurred and make a fully informed decision on whether an ADM is justified.

8.9 Codeshare and Interline PNRs – Ownership of Policy

One clear pain point for travel agencies is when there are multiple airlines represented in a PNR. The validating airline is the one that issues an ADM if a PNR is mishandled, so the validating airline should provide direction within its ASC policy on how to manage an ASC-impacted OA segment. However, the agency is often redirected to the operating carrier to determine next steps, often resulting in an unclear path forward.

The ASC Focus Group recommends that airlines follow the recommendations outlined in Section 5 and provide clear, concise, step-by-step documentation on how agents should manage PNRs that are impacted by an involuntary change, including how to manage impacts to OA segments. This information should be based on predetermined codeshare or interline ASC management agreements made at the time that a ticketing agreement and/or joint business venture relationship is established between airlines.

8.10 Verbal Authorization

There are scenarios where agents must call the validating (or operating) airline for direction. Some common scenarios include the following:

- The airline's policy states that the agency must call for direction and authorization to rebook, reissue or refund ASC-impacted PNRs.
- The airline has not published a policy, so agents need to call for more information.
- The validating airline advises to call OA for authorization to rebook when ASC impacts the OA.
- The needs of the passenger are not met using the published policy and the agent is seeking alternative options to ensure the customer is able to travel.)

When calling airlines for this type of assistance, the expectation is that the airline will provide direction as to what the agent may do to take care of the passenger.

- In some cases, the airline agent will provide direction, along with a specific waiver code to use
- In some cases, the airline agent may provide direction and advise that no waiver code is needed.
- In all cases, a travel agent will likely ask for the airline agent's name, location and Sine to document in their PNR and/or internal CRM tool, naming the person who gave them the authority to take a specific action.)

Unfortunately, even with a waiver code and/or airline agent name, location and Sine, the agency can still be issued an ADM for improper processing. These ADMs are generally disputed by the travel agency (providing details of the waiver and airline agent information), but the disputes are often denied, as there is seemingly no documentation or proof on the airline's side that any sort of authorization was given, or the information provided was misinterpreted by the travel agent.

The ASC Focus Group recommends the following to mitigate this issue:

- Airline agents should be very clear when providing a waiver or authorization to the agency as to what the waiver actually covers (e.g., refund, waived change fee, etc.).
 - » Travel agents should ask clarifying questions to ensure they understand exactly what is covered.
- When airline agents allow for an exception or provide direction (e.g., alternate RBD, routing, date of travel) or when overbooking into the original RBD, book the space so that the agency can then Ignore Record (IR) the PNR, see the updated space and carry on with the transaction. This will validate that the airline is approving the action and save research efforts for airlines, auditors and agencies.
- In lieu of the above, airline agents can document information in the "SSR" field so it is visible to the agent and serves as validation of what was agreed to.

- When providing a waiver code, airline agents should advise the travel agent where that code should be placed (e.g. endorsement box (ENDO Box), "OSI," etc.) as part of the reissue transaction. For refund transactions, waivers must be placed in the waiver code box in the GDS entry or manually loaded into ARC's Interactive Agent Reporting (IAR) tool, as there is no endorsement box for a refund.
- Travel agent should ask for this information if it is not offered up by the airline
- Where appropriate, airline agents should document any internal tool that auditors use to validate the waiver, authorization or direction given to the travel agency.
- Travel agencies could opt to record calls to airlines to help support a dispute later, if needed.

8.11 PNR Segment Updates

Most airline booking policies require that agents update (clean up) ASC-impacted PNR segments well in advance of scheduled departure to avoid ADMs. Agencies that do not clean up PNRs in advance of departure are subject to receiving ADMs (fees per segment, generally).

PNRs come into agency queues with unconfirmed segment statuses 24/7. Not all agencies are open 24/7 to receive and action appropriately. Notably, when these are related to IROP or exception policy situations, the volume can be very high and potentially unmanageable if manual action is required (up to and including customer contact).

The ASC Focus Group recommends that airlines allow a reasonable amount of time in advance of departure for agencies to manage PNR cleanup. It is suggested, at minimum, to follow the current ARC-recommended void window parameters, and where a PNR is placed on queue within one day of travel, and where the segments are not cleaned up, an ADM should not be issued.

8.12 Use of Passive Segments (BK/GK/YK)

Most airline booking policies indicate that agencies should not utilize passive segments, or the airline may issue an ADM.

There are times when an agency is unable to book protection in the PNR themselves, and the airline ends up having to book and confirm one or more segments on their end. Due to system constraints, it may be that the agency is unable to view these new segment(s) in the agency PNR. It is then necessary for agents to sell the specific flights into the PNR using passive booking formats (BK/GK/YK). The reason for this is:

- In order to complete the reissue transaction, the segment(s) must be present in the PNR.
- In order for the agency to print a confirmation or invoice for the customer, the segments must be present in the PNR.
- In order for the customer to see the complete itinerary online, the segment must be present in the PNR.
- In order for any travel agent to have full visibility and be able to take subsequent action on behalf of the customer, the segments must be present in the PNR.
- In order for the travel agency to run an accurate report in the GDS to identify travelers that may be impacted by a specific exception event in a particular city or region, the segment must be present in the PNR.

The ASC Focus Group recommends that airlines allow the use of passive segments in the case of an ASC, where the agency is not able to sell re-protection into their PNR and relies on the airline to provide protection in the airline's reservation system.

Summary

As mentioned at the beginning of this document, these are recommendations for an optimal way to address the issues surrounding irregular operations and/or schedule changes. These guidelines offer the best opportunity for travelers, agents and airlines to experience a positive outcome when these issues occur.

This document will be amended and updated in the coming months.

Glossary

- A4A** – Airlines 4 America
- ADM** – Agency debit memo
- ARC** – Airlines Reporting Corporation
- ARNK** – Arrival unknown
- CTC Format** – Customer contact information format
- CXL** – Cancel
- ENDO BOX** – Endorsement box
- Fare Family** – This definition will vary by carrier
- FLT** – Flight
- GDS** – Global distribution system
- IATA** – International Air Transport Association
- IROP** – Irregular operations
- MCT** – Minimum connecting time
- OA** – Other airline
- O/D** – Origin/destination
- OSI** – Other service information
- PNR** – Passenger name record
- RBD** – Reservation booking data
- SKCHG** – Schedule change
- SSR** – Special service request
- TTL** – Ticketing time limit
- VCR** – Virtual coupon record

ARC