

# Setting the record straight on Sydney Airport slots



Slot management at Sydney Airport has been the subject of considerable debate recently. It's an important topic that impacts millions of trips a year, so below we have outlined how the slot system works, how we manage disruption to our schedule and how weather in one port can have a knock-on effect on others.

## How does the slot system work?

- Landing and take off slots are how airports manage their capacity, i.e. how many flights they can handle at a particular time.
- The most sought after slots are usually in the morning and afternoon/early evening peaks because it reflects when people most want to travel.
- Slots are allocated on a 'use it or lose it' basis, with a buffer for operational issues like bad weather or engineering faults that might stop a flight from taking off.
- An 80/20 rule applies at most major airports around the world — meaning that airlines have to operate at least 80 per cent of their slots in order to keep them. The 20 per cent buffer is for operational issues that happen from time to time, and applies at the busiest airports around the world as the global standard.

## Is Qantas hoarding slots at Sydney to block access for other airlines?

- In short, no.
- Qantas is only able to keep the slots it actually uses under the 80/20 rule.
- For the most recent six month period (northern summer) Qantas operated 90 per cent of its Sydney slots — meaning we are well above the minimum level required to maintain our slots.
- While peak hour slots are sought after, Sydney Airport is not full — only 75 per cent of its total capacity is allocated.
- In both 2023 scheduling seasons Rex was awarded the majority of additional peak slots it asked for — 108 additional slots in total. Bonza chose not to apply for any slots.
- Qantas supports proposed reforms to make it easier for new entrants to obtain peak slots.

## If it's not about protecting slots, why are cancellation rates on busy routes always higher?

- Sydney Airport argues that delays and cancellations on high frequency domestic routes, like Sydney to Melbourne or Sydney-Canberra, are a sign that airlines are hoarding slots. This is not the case.

- When bad weather, air traffic control shortages or our own operational issues mean that we can't fly our schedule as planned, we cancel flights from high-frequency routes because the impact on customers is usually limited to an hour or so.
- This helps us protect lower frequency routes to regional centres and places like Darwin or Hobart where the impact of a cancelled flight for passengers could be half a day or more.
- While we try hard to avoid any delay or cancellation, our next priority is to minimise the total impact on passengers as much as possible.

## Does Qantas cancel half-empty flights to save money?

- No.
- We work hard to keep changes to our schedule to a minimum, especially once our crewing rosters are set a month in advance.
- If a flight is cancelled, it creates a knock-on impact to our network because aircraft and crew didn't fly to where we planned them to be. This adds costs and complexity that we try hard to avoid.
- On average, our domestic flights are around 75–80 per cent full but we don't cancel a flight because it falls below this level.

## Why are flights cancelled due to "weather" when the sun is shining in Sydney?

- About 75 per cent of the Qantas domestic fleet passes through Sydney each day, en-route to-or-from somewhere else.
- That means flights in Sydney can often be impacted by bad weather or air traffic control issues in other parts of the country.
- A typical pattern for a Qantas 737 is Melbourne–Sydney–Gold Coast–Sydney–Adelaide–Sydney, which shows how delays on one part of the network can show up in other parts.