

ASTA Calls on Congress to Establish Clear 'Back-to-Gate' Limits

Alexandria, Va., July 27, 2009- On Friday, July 24, ASTA wrote to the Congressional sponsors of pending legislation to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration on the subject of so-called "back-to-gate" time limits for delayed passenger flights. In the letter, ASTA requested that Congress establish a clearly-defined time limit beyond which passengers who have been subjected to lengthy on-board tarmac delays must be permitted to return to the gate and exit the delayed aircraft. The legislation was reported out of a key Senate Committee last week, and is slated for a vote in both chambers of Congress later this fall.

In the letter, ASTA said:

In the face of continuing delays and the evident lack of concrete efforts on the part of the airlines to create a meaningful solution thereto, and absent a robust reporting mechanism that would compel airlines and airports to report back to the Department of Transportation on their actual progress in implementing the recommendations in the Task Force's [National Task Force to Develop Model Contingency Plans to Deal with Lengthy Airline On-Board Ground Delays (Tarmac Delay Task Force)] final report, we see little hope for real progress in this area without further action from Congress.

Therefore, we respectfully ask that you establish a clear standard for the airlines to follow. A Congressionally-defined standard will not in itself solve the inexorable problem of chronic flight delays, but it will surely represent an improvement over the current system, in which people are trapped on planes without adequate supplies for hours on end.

On Nov. 12, 2008, the Tarmac Delay Task Force, on which ASTA held a seat, concluded nearly a year of debate about how to deal with inevitable major flight delays that strand passengers on aircraft for periods up to eight or even 10 hours. Among the Task Force's recommendations was that each airline be permitted to establish its own time limit at each airport for deplaning passengers who have been subjected to lengthy delays. In addition, the Task Force recommended that delayed passengers be provided with "regular and timely information" concerning the reason for such delays.

See full [Letter to U.S. Congress](#)

See full [Letter to the U.S. Senate](#)

ABOUT ASTA

ASTA's (American Society of Travel Agents) mission is to facilitate the business of selling travel through effective representation, shared knowledge and the enhancement of professionalism. ASTA seeks a retail travel marketplace that is profitable, growing and a rewarding place to work, invest and do business.