MIDDLE EAST NEEDS BETTER AIR TRAFFIC RELATIONS, IATA CHIEF SAYS

News / Airlines

Countries in the **Middle East** must expand cooperation on **air traffic management** and improve safety and security standards to take advantage of surging passenger demand, as the region is expected to lead aviation growth, the International Air Transport Association chief said.

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“As a region, the Middle East is leading the world with passenger demand expected to expand 4.6 per cent annually for the next two decades,” Tony Tyler told the Arab Air Carriers Organisation in Jeddah.

He expects the region to become a market of 383 million passengers per year.

“This will increase the Middle East’s importance in aviation affairs. But with influence comes responsibility, and we will be looking for AACO’s continued leadership.”

Safety and security were highlighted as key areas of improvement for Middle Eastern airlines following last month’s downing of a Russian jet over Egypt, even as the jet hull loss rate for Mena had improved to 0.63 per million sectors flown compared with a five-year trend of 1.82.

Mr Tyler urged Middle East carriers to step up their efforts to implement International Civil Aviation Organization (Icao) safety standards, noting that average rate of compliance across the region stood at 68 per cent.

He praised the UAE for its compliance rate of 98.86 per cent of Icao safety standards – the highest compliance rate in the organisation’s history – and set a challenge for 80 per cent of Arab states to match today’s 68 per cent benchmark by the end of 2018.

Effective cooperation on air traffic management (ATM) between the countries of the region was of paramount importance, with the growth in capacity not keeping pace with the surging demand, according to Mr Tyler.

“Emirates alone has suffered 1,740,000 minutes of ATM-related departure delay for the year-to-date,” he said.

“That is equal to having three of their aircraft completely unproductive for an entire year. This leads to significant inefficiency to hub operations, which we all know need high levels of on-time performance.”

“The region grew by 13 per cent last year and that trend is set to continue. Without action, this situation will get much worse. Cooperation between states to achieve change is paramount.”

Mr Tyler urged Arab states to fully commit to Iata’s Middle East ATM Enhancement Programme, designed to speed up regional cooperation to overcome fragmented airspace structures and ensure efficient infrastructure, and called for a more flexible use of airspace between military and civilian operations.

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