

Basel-Mulhouse Airport, 28 January 2021

Press Release

A pandemic demanding extra-ordinary measures; sustainable development still the priority

Air transport is one of the industries most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout these unprecedented times, EuroAirport has continued to discharge its responsibilities as a reliable and committed partner of the tri-national Region. The Airport has demonstrated its responsiveness to constantly evolving regulations and their effects on airport operations. Faced with a drastic 71% drop in passenger traffic, to 2.6 million, EuroAirport has implemented significant reductions in expenditures and introduced strict cost containment measures. Despite the lack of visibility, sustainable development is more than ever at the core of Basel-Mulhouse Airport's activities.

Impact of the unprecedented crisis on EuroAirport's three strategic areas of activity

In 2020, EuroAirport welcomed 2.6 million passengers, a 71% drop from the traffic levels in 2019 which was a bumper year with a record 9.1 million passengers.

A direct consequence of the pandemic-related travel restrictions, the decrease was most significant in the months from April to June when air traffic plunged by over 97%. Traffic picked up somewhat in the summer, especially in August, the strongest month of the crisis, when the Airport welcomed 390,000 passengers, a reduction of approximately 40% compared with August 2019. In November, traditionally the quietest month of the year for the Airport, traffic plummeted anew, dropping 87% against the prior year.

Total flight movements followed a similar, albeit more moderate trend, with a 48% reduction representing just over 51,570 flights for the year, of which approximately 33,000 commercial. This was in part due to lower average flight occupancy rates.

Despite these lower load factors and reduced frequencies, EuroAirport preserved its role as a gateway to Europe and the Mediterranean, offering up to eighty destinations in 2020 – compared with approximately one hundred in 2019. The airlines have had to continuously adapt their flight schedules, however, to keep up with the rapid developments in the health regulations of the various countries. Thirteen airlines operated from the Airport over the year, compared with twenty-five in 2019.

Cargo activities, on the other hand, recorded a 2.3% increase, up from 106,100 tonnes in 2019 to 108,500 in 2020. Basel-Mulhouse Airport is an important cargo hub serving most of Switzerland, eastern France, and southern Baden-Württemberg. In 2020, cargo flights transported 47,700 tonnes of goods, a 4.7% increase over 2019. Express freight was quite stable at 16,745 tonnes for the year and played a major role in transporting medical equipment during the pandemic. All-cargo tonnage, up 23.9% compared with 2019, accounted for the lion's share of the overall increase. EuroAirport infrastructure, notably the temperature controlled terminal facilities built specifically for the pharmaceutical industry, played an essential role in the increase in cargo activities during the crisis.

As for the Airport's third area of activity, which specialises in aircraft maintenance and fitting, the impact of the pandemic has been differentiated. Certain companies have had to lay off employees while others have withstood the crisis better. The forthcoming completion of construction work on Hangar 5 for AMAC is welcome news, especially in these times.

EuroAirport responsiveness and flexibility in the face of an unprecedented crisis

Passenger traffic accounts for 80% of EuroAirport's annual turnover. This turnover fell by approximately 50% in 2020 compared with the prior year. The Airport has thus been faced with a significant loss in revenues. Accordingly, its first priority has been to secure its cash flow by containing costs. From the outset of the crisis, drastic cutbacks in investment – to one third of the original budget – and reductions in labour costs through recruitment freezes and recourse to short-time work have been the mainstay actions.

Safety is at the heart of airport activities, and another major challenge of the pandemic has been to ensure the health and safety of passengers and employees by implementing security concepts across the entire airport. EuroAirport has reacted promptly to the new demands and introduced comprehensive protective and preventive measures. Among other things, a coronavirus screening centre was set up for passengers arriving from France's "red" list of countries. Thanks to the bi-national nature of the Airport, Swiss nationals and passengers with a Swiss residence permit were exempted from these tests.

Basel-Mulhouse Airport never ceased operations during the crisis. Freight activities managed to sustain exports as well as securing imports of medical products and personal protection equipment like facemasks. Moreover, when the Alsace was heavily affected by the pandemic in the spring, EuroAirport played a key role for medical flights.

Outlook for 2021

In 2021, EuroAirport will continue to pursue its strict cost containment objectives to cope with the crisis. Since it is impossible to make any reliable forecasts, three scenarios have been developed with traffic levels between three and five million passengers. Several factors will determine the pace of the recovery in passenger traffic: the speed of national vaccination programmes, the ensuing reduction in contamination rates and corresponding easing of travel restrictions. EuroAirport expects that it will take several years for air traffic to return to 2019 levels.

Progress with environmental issues despite the crisis

Although the pandemic brought passenger traffic to a standstill, environmental issues – especially the reduction of its sound "footprint" and CO2 emissions – have remained a top priority.

To reduce flight noise levels, EuroAirport launched a Balanced Approach (*Approche équilibrée, Ausgewogener Ansatz*) initiative in close consultation with the competent authorities in 2020. In May 2020, the Board of Directors submitted the results of the Balanced Approach study to the French Civil Aviation Authority (DGAC). Based on these results, EuroAirport has applied to the authorities for a prohibition on all scheduled take-offs between 11 pm and midnight and for stricter noise standards throughout the night for all flights scheduled between 10 pm and 6 am. The next phase in this procedure, a three-month public survey conducted in France, Switzerland, and Germany, will be launched in the coming weeks.

The second initiative designed to achieve significant progress in terms of noise control over the long term is the noise limitation curve. The purpose of this measure is to guarantee a maximum noise level in the long term which the Airport may not exceed, and which will be determined in consultation with all stakeholders. The objective is to introduce this innovative tool in 2022.

As for the reduction in CO2 emissions, EuroAirport's "Airport Carbon Accreditation" (ACA), level 2, was renewed in 2020. A further reduction will be achieved through an ACA Level 3 accreditation which requires

the involvement of all Airport partners in the reduction of emissions. Last year, moreover, the Airport decided that the objective of carbon neutrality, originally set for 2050, was to be attained in 2030. Lastly, progress was also made on the rail connection. In this context, an agreement on the joint funding of the comprehensive planning studies was signed by all the parties involved in December 2020.

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