



Remarks from Angela Gittens
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We are all in this together: the stakeholder partnership of airports,
airlines and ground handlers
Understanding the essential relationship between the airport
and ground handling operators

Thank you for inviting me to speak at the 15th Annual Ground Handling International Conference. First, I want to tell you a bit about Airports Council International (ACI), talk a little about some traffic trends that will affect us all and then talk about how what we do at ACI is relevant to you and throw out some challenges to you on the way forward for structuring this relationship between airports, airlines and ground handlers for our mutual benefit and for the benefit of the travelling public.

So: who are we? Airports Council International is the worldwide representative of airports, created in 1991 through the merger of two worldwide airport associations, one founded in the US in 1948, one founded in Europe in 1950. Our mission is to promote the collective interests of the world's airports and the communities they serve, and to

promote professional excellence in airport operations and management. We have 573 members operating 1751 airports in 174 countries, representing 95% of the world's passenger traffic.

ACI is comprised of six units: the World office in Montreal, which is where I hail from, and five regional offices: Africa, Asia-Pacific, which includes the Middle East, Europe, Latin-American/Caribbean and North America.

Each ACI Regional Office has a governing Board that deals with the issues and regulatory bodies specific to that region, while ACI World deals with global issues and global regulatory bodies, like the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) and with other international associations like the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the Civil Air Navigation Service Organization (CANSO).

We are all in it together and access to air transportation has become fundamental for social and economic development. And there have been and continue to be major shifts in that access.

In sheer volume worldwide passenger numbers at airports reached 5.7 billion in 2012, increasing by 4.4% over 2011.

Looking at passenger traffic by region, airports in the more mature markets of Europe and North America experienced modest gains in passenger traffic while volume in the BRICS of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa saw growth of 7.4 percent.

The broader group of emerging markets achieved even more remarkable growth – look at Istanbul, Jakarta, Dubai, Bangkok and Singapore – all airports with over 40 million annual passengers experiencing double digit growth.

In terms of overall regional growth rates in passenger volume, we see that the Middle East was the fastest growing, at 13%, with their governments and airlines taking the biggest advantage of liberalization, Asia-Pacific second with 8% growth, followed closely by the Latin-America Caribbean region at 7.6%.

Africa is also experiencing strong economic growth in some countries but the disparities in year-over-year growth rates are significant across the continent. The airports in North Africa have growth rates that are distorted due to the fact that the figures were so depressed in 2011 from the social unrest. So: 2012 passenger traffic grew in Africa by 6.1 percent over 2011 – with a recovering North Africa at 11.4% and a more stable Sub Saharan Africa market growing at 2.2%.

The growth and the shifts to emerging markets have sparked ever greater interest in the knowledge transfer function at ACI. We publish guidance material, handbooks on key

topics such as Airside Safety, we regularly hold conferences and seminars to facilitate the sharing of knowledge among members.

And we have developed a rigorous training capacity, focussed initially around safety competence but now encompassing all areas of airport management and operations, and delivered in a range of modes, from on-line, to classroom, to customized courses for an in-house environment. We are expanding our capability to deliver curricula in other languages than English, starting with French and Spanish a few years ago, and moving into Arabic and Chinese. We also have a scholarship program so that airport management from least developed nations can partake of our training and conferences. So, we felt we were doing a lot but the safety statistics coming out of ICAO told us we needed to do more. Told us that we could not necessarily count on the States to oversee airport safety compliance.

So with the strong support of ICAO, we launched the Airport Excellence in Safety program (APEX in Safety) based on the concept of peer review that has long been used by airports in their other business activities such as master planning. We decided to take that concept and apply it to our top priority: Safety.

The way it works is that, at the request of a Host airport, we assemble a mission comprised of safety experts from our staff, from other airports – we call them Safety Partners- and from regulators who are willing to lend us their Annex 14 inspectors in a

“friendly” capacity. We review the airports’ compliance with safety regulations and their vulnerability to accidents.

The results of the peer review belong to the Host Airport – they can share the information as they see fit. We just report findings with no attribution so that ACI, and ICAO, can see where we need to recommend change or provide more guidance or training – to States or to airports. For example, one common finding is that the airport operator does not have the authority to enforce airside driving and apron safety rules, or have access to apron incident and accident reports – that may belong elsewhere in the government and may or may not get the priority attention it deserves.

What we have seen from peer review missions is that the participants from our Safety Partners don’t just share their expertise – they themselves learn from the experience.

Their CEOs are telling us that they have found it to be a source of job enrichment for their most skilled personnel. It is the ultimate win-win.

I’ve gone through all this to illustrate the fact that ACI places a high priority on safety and efficiency and this naturally applies to ground handling. Whether they are provided by the airport itself, the airline or independent ground handlers, ground handling activities can pose serious safety concerns to the airport operator, most notably airside vehicle operations, driver training, communication and phraseology, safety reporting, and adherence to operational safety procedures.

The good, the bad and the ugly – there are so many things that can go wrong – sometimes spectacularly, with the fast-moving “ballet” of ground support equipment in close proximity to delicate and expensive aircraft. Ground handling errors have expensive consequences, causing operational delays, damage to aircraft, and involving injuries and even deaths.

We don't believe that we have reliable statistics about ground handling accidents (let alone incidents) due to under-reporting, but clearly the problem is a “silent plague” that is too important to ignore. Besides the direct safety issues, ground handling accidents and associated delay costs are reported by IATA to cost the airline industry billions of dollars U.S. annually and it's increasing.

ACI intends to introduce new practices for standardized reporting of safety-relevant events at airports. We are currently developing a Recommended Practice for airport operators and this would include a section on ground handling. Safety data is a highly sensitive matter, especially comparisons of safety key performance indicators (KPIs) among airports. Invalid comparisons - especially if made public - could lead to a strong adverse reaction, particularly from any airports shown in a poor light simply because they have successfully implemented a “just culture” and have been able to increase the reporting rate. Despite these sensitivities, we do see significant value in sharing information between peer groups of airports, and, we will encourage confidential sharing of safety key performance indicators. ACI will act as custodian of these data for use by members on a de-identified basis.

We will offer specific guidance to aerodrome operators on how to set up a safety data collection and recording program relevant to an individual airport (using parameters such as size, complexity, and the maturity of their Safety Management System). ICAO has no specific Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) for ground handling operations so it is essentially unregulated at the global level. IATA has the IATA Safety Audit for Ground Operations (ISAGO) program which aims to improve ground safety and reduce accidents and incidents. The present criteria for ISAGO audits were developed by IATA, in cooperation with airlines and ground service providers.

We have recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding with IATA to broaden collaboration between the two associations. We are envisioning as part of this increased collaboration to have IATA provide input into the ACI Airside Safety Handbook, which would take into account the air carrier's perspective on ground handling safety. As well we would provide IATA airport operators' concerns for inclusion in a revised IATA Ground Operations Manual (IGOM).

We are also open to working with others, like the Airport Services Association (ASA). We observe that many airport operators have put in place a local agreement with ground handlers that not only covers commercial issues such as rental of space and fees for access/franchise, but safety matters as well. Such an agreement may require a ground handling provider to have defined and documented safety management

procedures in place, not necessarily a full SMS, but sections relevant to apron operations.

I might add that the fact that ground handling is not regulated in a consistent manner is gaining attention at ICAO which has been asked to look into more direct regulation of ground handling.

Earlier this month our World Governing Board participated in a very lively discussion on the future of the airport operator's role vis-à-vis ground handling safety. The ACI Safety & Technical Committee has been mandated to work on the issue and report back to the Board with their recommendations, at the ACI World Annual General Assembly in May 2014 in Seoul.

What is certain is that operations of airlines, airports and ground handling are interwoven as we all work together for the benefits of timely, efficient and safe air operation. We are all in this together and we are all important parts of the total aviation system. It is important that we work together and combine efforts. ACI believes it is in the interest of safety, cost efficiency and optimal use of scarce capacity to have good oversight over ground handling activities that are performed at the airport.

Ladies and gentlemen, it has become apparent that safety matters relating to ground handling service provision at airports need to be addressed in a more holistic manner and on a global scale. Ground handling issues are up for discussion as never before,

and ACI wants to work with ICAO and industry partners to shape the future of ground handling.

Thank you very much. Please enjoy the rest of your conference.