

Airlines scramble to rejig schedules amid U5 5G rollout concerns

MAJOR international airlines rushed to rejig or cancel flights to the United States ahead of a 5G wireless rollout on Wednesday that has triggered safety concerns, despite two wireless carriers saying they will delay parts of the deployment.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) had warned that potential 5G interference could affect height readings that play a key role in bad-weather landings on some jets and airlines say the Boeing 777 is among models initially in the spotlight.

Despite an announcement by AT&T and Verizon that they would pause the 5G rollout near airports, several airlines still canceled flights or switched aircraft models.

Late Tuesday, the FAA began updating its guidance on which airports and aircraft models would be affected, in a move expected to dramatically lessen the impact of the nearly 1,500 notices of 5G restrictions issued by the regulator.

The world's largest operator of the Boeing 777, Dubai's Emirates, said earlier it would suspend flights to nine US destinations from Jan. 19, the planned date for the deployment of 5G wireless services.

Emirates flights to New York's JFK, Los Angeles and Washington DC will continue to operate.

Japan's two major airlines, All Nippon Airways and Japan Airlines, said they would curtail Boeing 777 flights. ANA said it was canceling or changing the aircraft used on some US flights.

Korean Air Lines said it had switched away from 777s and 747-8s on six US passenger and cargo flights, Taiwan's China Airlines said it would reschedule some flights and Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific Airways said it would deploy different aircraft types if needed.

The airlines said they were acting in response to a notice from Boeing that 5G signals may interfere with the radio altimeter on the 777, leading to restrictions.

A spokesman for Boeing had no immediate comment.

The 777 last year was the second-most used widebody plane on flights to and from US

airports with around 210,000 flights, behind only the 767, according to data from FlightRadar24.

Industry sources said Boeing had issued technical advisories noting potential interference, but that flight restrictions were in the hands of the FAA, which has for now limited operations at key airports unless airlines qualify for special approvals.

Radio altimeters give precise readings of the height above the ground on approach and help with automated landings, as well as verifying the jet has landed before allowing reverse thrust.

Air India, which serves four US destinations with Boeing 777s, said those flights would be curtailed or face changes in aircraft type starting from Wednesday.

WORKHORSE JET

The announcement of cancellations came despite the wireless carriers delaying turning on some 5G towers near key airports.

Airline industry sources said the decision had arrived too late to affect complex aircraft and crewing decisions for some Wednesday flights.

British Airways opted to switch aircraft on its daily flight to Los Angeles to an Airbus A380 from the usual Boeing 777 service, two people familiar with the matter told Reuters.

Web tracker Flightradar24 said the A350 may also be used. The radio altimeters on the two Airbus jets have been cleared while the planemaker is still assessing its other models.

The 777 mini-jumbo is a workhorse of the long-haul travel market that remains depressed following COVID-19, while its freighter equivalent has reshaped the aviation route map during the pandemic, according to a spokesman for Flightradar24.

Not all 777 flights are affected. Emirates, which is also a major user of the larger A380, will switch to the larger aircraft for Los Angeles and New York but keep flying the 777 to Washington, which is not affected. — **Reuters**

With Omicron, global economy spots chance to push past COVID

GOVERNMENTS worldwide are easing quarantine rules, reviewing coronavirus curbs and dialing back pandemic-era emergency support as they bid to launch their economies back into some version of normality.

The moves, motivated by the lower severity of the Omicron variant and the need to keep workers in work and the global recovery on track, have generated a whiff of optimism that has lifted oil and stock prices.

Health experts say the variant's rapid spread may yet herald a turning point in the pandemic.

However, they add, much depends on how authorities manage ongoing vaccination rollouts and balance other health measures still needed, while persuading their citizens not to throw caution to the wind.

"We are taking a big step and that also means we're taking a big risk," Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said last week before stores, hairdressers and gyms reopened in a partial lifting of a lockdown despite record numbers of new cases.

That lockdown was already something of a rarity, with most western countries well past that stage and focused on how to safely open up further.

Around half a dozen have cut quarantine times from 10 to five days, citing Omicron's faster infection cycle as grounds to loosen rules that have led to a wave of worker absences hitting businesses.

Britain and Israel have eased requirements for follow-up PCR

tests after a lateral flow result as Omicron's soaring infection rates overload laboratories. Local media say Britain could announce further easing of restrictions later this month.

Omicron's ability to rifle quickly through a population without causing a proportionate rise in hospitalizations and deaths even prompted Spain's prime minister to suggest it be treated akin to an endemic illness like flu.

LIVING WITH THE VIRUS

While few are using that specific word, policymakers whose priority now is to wean economies off the cheap money fueling inflation have started to depict the coronavirus as something businesses and households must learn to live with.

"What we are seeing is an economy that functions right through these waves of COVID," US Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said last week.

"If the experts are right and Omicron is going to go through really quickly and peak perhaps within a month and come down after that, I think it is likely you will see lower hiring and perhaps a pause in growth, but it should be short-lived."

Such a scenario would facilitate the Fed's full-on turn towards normalizing policy this year with as many as three interest rate hikes. Other central banks also looking to wind back stimulus share that view.

"It (Omicron) is proving very contagious but less deadly, so

economies will live with it," one European Central Bank policymaker told Reuters, adding the bank's baseline scenario assumed a "continued resolution of the health crisis in 2022".

Similarly, the Bank of Japan, while listing Omicron as a risk, is seen sticking to its view that the local economy will pursue a recovery driven by robust exports and massive state spending.

If that upbeat outlook materializes, governments would also be able to start winding back the emergency fiscal support which, according to the International Monetary Fund, led to the largest one-year surge in global debt since World War II.

In October, the Fund forecast global economic growth of 4.9% this year, while underscoring uncertainty posed by the coronavirus. It postponed the release of its latest outlook to Jan. 25 to factor in latest Omicron developments.

The rosy economic picture is also predicated on vaccination campaigns at sufficient levels to limit serious illness.

That means ramping up access to shots in the developing world as wealthier countries focus on the boosters that widespread evidence, including hard data from Italy and Germany, shows offer significant protection against the risk of hospitalization, intensive care and death.

Dutch COVID-19 hospitalizations, for instance, while off all-time pandemic peaks around 2,000, remain above 900.

That is impacting workplace absences and acute care for other

conditions, and the government is hoping to quickly increase a booster shot coverage rate of around 50% of adults, relatively low by euro zone standards.

Another fly in the ointment for any early return to normal may prove to be China's resolve to pursue a strict "COVID-zero" strategy likely to lead to shutdowns hitting supply chains and therefore its trade partners.

And while the belief that the global recovery can live with Omicron may be expedient, it may yet run up against the hard facts of epidemiology.

Lawrence Young, Professor of Molecular Oncology, University of Warwick, said US and Japanese studies showing that more than 30% of cases remain highly infectious after five days suggest moves to relax quarantine rules could backfire.

"This is a policy decision ...based on the need to get people back to work," he said. "...Returning people after five days risks highly infectious people returning to work or school."

He and other experts said those risks could be mitigated by strict enforcement of lateral flow testing, mask-wearing and contact-limiting — a tricky health message for authorities perceived to be easing up on some rules.

"There's a big sense that we're coming out of all of this," said Mr. Young. "But I think it's an interesting, dangerous period if people are too complacent about it." — **Reuters**

COVID-related depression drives labor shortages in UK

A MENTAL HEALTH crisis among working-age Britons made worse by the coronavirus pandemic is driving UK labor shortages that are causing severe recruitment difficulties for employers.

Official figures published Tuesday revealed that 411,000 people dropped out of the workforce between Feb. 2020, the month before lockdown, and November last year. Of those, 209,000 were "long-term sick," which is now the largest single reason for inactivity.

A lack of workers is creating serious problems for companies. The UK had almost 1.2 million unfilled vacancies in December despite record hiring, a shortfall that is driving up wages and holding back firms across the economy.

The long-term sick, a category that includes the physically disabled,

those with chronic illness and people with mental health conditions, pose a particular challenge for employers as they are harder to lure into the workforce than others who have temporarily dropped out.

Granular data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that almost the entire increase in those categorized long-term sick during the pandemic has been among people with depression, anxiety, learning difficulties and other mental health issues — rather than physical or chronic illness. The increase may also be linked to long COVID but it is not listed as a cause.

The figures also reveal a sharp rise in mental health issues for both the employed and the unemployed since the emergence of coronavirus disease

2019 (COVID-19). There had been an increase in mental health concerns before the pandemic, but numbers have shot up in the last two years.

"There's a long-run trend of increased reporting of poor mental health," said Tony Wilson, director of the Institute for Employment Studies. "The pandemic has probably made this worse, and the growth has been so large that even with employment rising it's also fueled very high inactivity."

Long-term sickness is now the single biggest cause of inactivity, overtaking the number of students not seeking work in the latest data. The numbers of short-term sick, which may capture those with long COVID, has increased by 21,000.

A rise in inactivity for reasons of mental health presents a far more difficult problem for employers than other forms of inactivity, such as the "discouraged" workers who want a job or students.

The annual population survey produced by the ONS shows that inactivity among the long-term sick rose by 274,300 in the year to Sept. 2021 compared with the year to Dec. 2019. Of those, 252,400 reported that they had depression and mental health disorders.

The data also showed the number of depressed people in work rose by 509,000 and the number of depressed unemployed people, who were still looking for work, increased by 59,300. — **Bloomberg**



6.2 HECTARE CENTRALHUB-TARLAC INDUSTRIAL WAREHOUSE COMPLEX NOW FULLY CONSTRUCTED.

On January 17, 2022, DoubleDragon Corporation's subsidiary CentralHub Industrial Centers Inc, a joint venture with Jollibee Foods Corporation, completes the construction of CentralHub-Tarlac Phase-4. The latest progress now fully completes the construction of the 6.2 hectare CentralHub-Tarlac industrial warehouse complex. DoubleDragon currently has completed CentralHub-Capiz, CentralHub-Tarlac, CentralHub-Pasig, CentralHub-Laguna1 and CentralHub-Laguna2, and will soon add to its completed portfolio are CentralHub-Iloilo, CentralHub-Davao, and CentralHub-Cebu. CentralHub Industrial Centers Inc., which to date has 43.8 hectares of industrial assets. DoubleDragon continues to ramp up the construction of its industrial warehouse portfolio after it recently completed its equity joint venture with Jollibee Foods Corp.