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FACILITATION (FAL) DIVISION — TWELFTH SESSION

Cairo, Egypt, 22 March to 2 April 2004

Agenda Item 2: Facilitation and security of travel documents and border control formalities
2.4: Advance passenger information (API)

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO PASSENGER DATA TRANSFER

(Presented by the Société internationale de télécommunications aeronautiques (SITA))

SUMMARY

This working paper recommends a community hub approach to API in order to balance the security needs of governments, the privacy rights of travellers and the operational efficiency requirements of airlines in the most effective way.

Action by the Division is in paragraph 3.1.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 SITA is a neutral telecommunications and technology provider owned and managed by more than 750 members of the air transport industry (ATI). As such, it has an active interest in a community solution for the collection, communication, and distribution of passenger information. SITA has garnered extensive experience of API (both real-time APP and batch APIS) and PNR-based solutions from working with a number of governments around the world.

1.2 The increased terrorist threat over the past few years has resulted in aviation security reaching the top of both the aviation and political agendas. In order to improve security, various governments have demanded that airlines collect and provide them with data on passengers and crew. This demand for data is likely to increase. It is therefore imperative that the deployment of technology is done in a coordinated and systematic way.

1.3 In its narrowest sense, API concerns the transmission of passenger document and flight information - typically to government agencies of destination countries in advance of arrival. However API needs to be seen in the wider context of data collection by airlines and its provision to governments:

a) governments may require PNR (booking) and check-in data which extends the API information to provide a more complete picture of a passenger; and

b) governments may require data not just for arriving passengers, but also for passengers who are departing or who are in transit.

1.4 Consider the case of a passenger flying from country A to country C via country B. The passenger is a national of country D. Up to 4 countries may have a legitimate interest in this passenger: C as the passenger's destination; B, a transit point; A as the point of departure; and D because A, B or C may require verification from D that the passenger's document is valid. This would be difficult enough if the data demands were purely for API (either real-time APP or post-departure batch APIS). However each of A, B & C may also mandate pre-departure APIS and PNR data together with post-departure PNR plus check-in data. Further complications arise because different departments with the same government require subsets of the same airline data.

1.5 The possibility of unconstrained acquisition by governments of data on passengers has obvious privacy implications. Similar comments apply to the extension of API standards to include extra data fields whose collection was not previously part of the normal booking process.

2. CONSIDERATIONS

2.1 A key challenge for this Division is to find a sensible balance between the competing demands for stricter security, operational efficiency, and passenger privacy and convenience. SITA submits that a community hub approach addresses this problem and allows passenger data to be transferred to government agencies consistently, and in the most effective way. Furthermore a hub approach enables the filtering of data in line with privacy requirements – which may vary bilaterally or according to the privacy regimes of particular governments.

2.2 Government requirements for passenger information are not coordinated, causing airlines to design multiple systems to deliver the same information to multiple governments – and even to different parts of the same government. This inefficiency is unnecessary and illustrates the uncoordinated and unilateral approach taken by some States to meet short-term needs.

2.3 A community hub approach would simplify both the collection and onward transmission of all required, permissible passenger information data elements - whether for API or PNR-related systems.

2.4 SITA believes that the success of the community hub approach has already been demonstrated by the use of APP in some countries. For APP, the hub broadcasts each airline check-in query to all governments with a legitimate interest in the transaction. The hub then assembles the responses from all the governments into a single response to the airline. SITA suggests that use of APP can reduce government demands for pre-departure PNR information and eliminate excessive polling for data due to its real-time nature.

2.5 Government agencies' demands for passenger information are evolving resulting in the need for a hub service that can be modified quickly and efficiently to meet emerging needs. The development of a community hub lends itself to this requirement.

3. ACTION BY THE DIVISION

3.1 The Division is invited to:

a) recognize the need for close international cooperation between all stakeholders to ensure the effective use of technology for API systems;

b) recommend a consistent community hub approach so that the proliferation of different systems and interfaces is avoided;

c) recommend, as far as possible, development of API systems based on accepted international standards;

d) ensure contracting States' requirements for passenger information are coordinated and harmonized; and

e) recommend that States which are considering their own API systems, look beyond the short term and consider the longer-term benefits that an international solution would bring.

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