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CONTRIBUTIONS OF PAPERLESS TRAVEL TO CHINA'S COVID-19 RESPONSE EFFORTS

(Presented by China)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper presents the scope and the progress in the implementation of paperless travel, and highlights the instrumental role it has played since the outbreak of COVID-19 in reducing contact and concentration of air passengers during travel, providing support for the safe travel of passengers, and science-based responses to the pandemic by airlines and airports, promoting innovation and expansion of aviation services, helping countries to better cope with the challenges brought by the pandemic to air transportation, and promoting the safe, stable and sustainable restart and recovery of air transportation in all countries.

<i>Strategic Objectives :</i>	This information paper relates to the Strategic Objectives: <i>Air Navigation Capacity and Efficiency, Aviation Security and Facilitation.</i>
<i>Financial Implications:</i>	N/A
<i>References:</i>	Resolution A40-27: <i>Innovation in Aviation</i>

¹ English and Chinese versions provided by China

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In 2017, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the Airports Council International (ACI) jointly launched the New Experience in Travel and Technologies (NEXTT) initiative, which aims to address the imbalance between the increasing passenger demand in future and the lack of support provided by existing civil aviation infrastructure, as well as to fulfill the desire of passengers to better control the travel. It seeks to promote the support and service capabilities of airports by simplifying and restructuring travel processes applied at /off airports for air passengers. Following its launch, the global civil aviation industry, taking off-airport check-in as a breakthrough, made efforts in self-service check-in and mobile check-in services, which enable passengers to complete check-in before arriving at airport. Currently, passengers in the United States and some countries in Europe can enjoy this convenient travel service.

1.2 Paperless travel involves the electronic and paperless air travel process, including ticketing, check-in, security check and boarding. At present, electronic ticket, electronic boarding pass and electronic temporary travel certificate are widely applied in China. In addition, various paperless and digital products such as smart baggage check-in, smart parking and smart display are used in some airports. With the implementation of China's civil aviation popularization strategy, passengers' demands for a more automatic check-in and more control in their travel increase. Driven by both demand and technology, China's civil aviation has actively responded to the NEXTT initiative and launched an industry-wide "Self-service Check-In" initiative at the beginning of 2017, and by the end of 2019, it had achieved the target of "more than 70% of passengers at airports with an annual passenger throughput of over 10 million using self-service check-in".

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Paperless travel that enhances the travel experience of passengers

2.1.1 Contact reduction

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (hereinafter referred to as the pandemic), some airports in China have been actively implementing paperless travel and contactless services, which not only improves travel efficiency by saving the time taken by passengers in the check-in process, but also is instrumental to the pandemic containment as it reduces the contact between passengers and airport staff and thus reduces the risk of infection. Although China's civil aviation industry witnessed a decrease in passenger traffic in 2020 due to the pandemic, passengers became more inclined to use self-service check-in for travel as a result of the pandemic containment measures. According to statistics, the percentage of domestic passengers who used self-service check-in in all Chinese airports with an annual passenger throughput of over 10 million increased to 72.2% in 2020.

2.1.2 Passenger tracking for the purpose of the pandemic containment

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, through implementing paperless travel, Chinese airlines and airports have been able to obtain the information and contact details of passengers in advance, which provide important inputs for the tracking and tracing of passengers' itineraries by the National Health Commission and other epidemic prevention and control departments, as well as for the subsequent screening and tracing for confirmed patients and close contacts. For example, Beijing Capital Airport has built the "One-click Backchecking System", which can backcheck confirmed patients' itineraries and find their close contacts. With the existing temperature measurement process unchanged, the newly installed Internet + temperature measurement system in the airport improves the recognition rate and accuracy of abnormal temperature measurement and traffic efficiency, and reduces on-site manual pressure.

2.1.3 Passenger service products optimization

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, some airports and airlines in China have been working to accelerate the application of digital and information technologies. By continuously optimizing the supply of services, they have launched a series of digital, intelligent and characteristic civil aviation novel applications. For example, Beijing Daxing Airport has introduced the service product of "one-pass + face boarding" which enables passengers to enjoy the paperless travel in all processes; Sichuan Airlines provides user-friendly services such as paperless refund and change of ticket, and paperless flight delay compensation; a number of airlines and airports have offered "online health declaration + electronic check-in" services on their official websites, APPs and WeChat mini-programs, laying the groundwork for attracting more passengers to use paperless travel in the post-pandemic era.

2.1.4 Services for special passengers

During the pandemic, some airports in China have been working to improve the mechanism for ensuring adequate services for elderly passengers and special passengers. While ensuring the implementation of the pandemic containment requirements, the airports provide manual health check services for elderly passengers, retain offline ticket windows and manual service counters, allow cash payment and voucher printing, and provide consultation, guidance and other facilitation services and health checks for elderly passengers and other special passengers to enjoy efficient, smooth and caring air travel. Priority ticket windows, special waiting areas or green channels and guidance signs have been set up to make travel easier for elderly passengers at airports that are well-positioned to do so. For example, Beijing Daxing Airport has provided intelligent handheld check equipment at the entrances and exits of large passenger flows to help the elderly, children and other passengers traveling alone without smartphones to verify their "Beijing Health Kit" codes.



Figure 1 Daxing Airport's paperless service for passengers with special need

2.2 Paperless travel's contribution to the society and economy

Paperless travel can save passengers' time, and reduce paper boarding pass costs and hardware and software expenses of airports. It is also an important practice for airlines to take their social responsibilities in low-carbon and environmental protection. It is estimated that from 2019 to 2020, 570 million passengers benefited from paperless travel rolled out in China's civil aviation sector, which resulted in a saving of 580 million hours for passengers and 430 million yuan in paper and investment costs for airlines and airports, as well as a reduction of 8,622 tons in carbon emissions, which is equivalent to the emissions of 1,597 1.6-liter cars in nearly a year. The simplified processes and upgraded efficiency brought by paperless travel are also conducive to the transformation and upgrading of China's civil aviation industry, with remarkable social and economic benefits.

2.3 **Challenges**

As an important initiative to improve public services in the civil aviation industry, paperless travel is a systematic project involving the use of technologies, laws development, social application and institutional innovation, which requires the joint efforts of the whole industry to promote its use, harmonize service standards and solve an array of problems such as changing passengers' travel habits, enhancing airports' business processes, improving airlines' marketing and operations, and going beyond traditional approaches. Therefore, the implementation of paperless travel is a process which cannot happen overnight, but requires step-by-step efforts.

3. **CONCLUSION**

3.1 For the civil aviation industry, paperless travel not only changes the concept and mode of existing passenger travel services, but also enables passengers to better control their journeys. In addition, it has the advantages of saving passengers' time, and reducing cost on printing paper boarding pass and investment in airport hardware and software facilities. More importantly, it represents a significant practice for airlines to shoulder social responsibility of reducing carbon emissions, thus making significant social and economic contributions. During the pandemic, the implementation of such measures as effectively reducing contact between people has improved passengers' travel experience, thereby further stimulating the potential of the air transport market, accelerating the transformation and upgrading of traditional air services and speeding up the comprehensive digital and electronic transformation of passenger services in the global aviation industry.

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