

Baggage sortation issues at OR Tambo resolved

The technical issue that affected the baggage sortation system in the domestic terminal at OR Tambo International Airport has been successfully resolved. The glitch, which occurred on the morning of 22 December, saw several domestic passengers' bags being left behind when some aircraft departed from the airport without all baggage on board. Several flights were also delayed to allow for baggage to be loaded. ACSA subsequently made arrangements with the respective airlines to enable affected passengers' bags to reach their owners timeously.



Source: SpringbokSam via [Wikimedia Common](#)

Terence Delomoney, group executive operations management at ACSA, notes that the technical issue that affected the baggage sorter was not the result of wear and tear or a lack of maintenance, but rather due to an incident that led to the physical breakage of an electro-mechanical sensor.

"The problem has been resolved and the entire process continues to be vigorously examined. We are now working hard to ensure that the remaining backlog of short-shipped bags is cleared as soon as possible," says Delomoney.

Out of a total of 77,569 bags processed at OR Tambo International Airport on 22 and 23 December, 31,118 were domestic and regional and of these about 4,500 were short-shipped. This translates into 19% of domestic and 13% of regional bags being short-shipped over the two days.

"We now have less than 80 bags in the network – from the original approximately 4,500 – that need reunification with their owners, many of whom have indicated that they will fetch them at the destination airports," says Delomoney.

He adds that ACSA apologises for the significant disruption to these customers over this Christmas period and wants to assure the public that it has taken all possible steps to work with airlines and other stakeholders to resolve the issue.

Airlines affected and mitigation efforts

ACSA can report that four domestic and regional airlines – FlySafair, Airlink, Lift and Cemair – were affected by the intermittent stoppages experienced by the baggage sorter. These airlines suffered significant delays and backlogs of bags left in the basement of the terminal for two consecutive days.

"Due to the problem, most domestic airlines decided to delay flights and wait for passengers' bags to be loaded. This was because most flights were full and no space was available on later flights to transport short-shipped bags to their owners," says Delomoney.

"The major concern from airlines flying to regional destinations was that most passengers travelling to Mauritius, Victoria Falls and Mpumalanga were travelling for the holidays, so all bags needed to make it onto their flights."

The other concern was that flights with one-day-a-week frequency – such as those on the Sentalina route – would see affected passengers having to wait another week before receiving their baggage. African destinations such as Bulawayo, Harare, Maputo, Lusaka, Lilongwe, Ndola, Windhoek, Pemba, Manzini, Botswana and Antananarivo were of particular concern.

ACSA mobilised most of its manpower to assist with carrying bags to other check-in counters and emergency lifts to ease congestion. Some ACSA staff were posted at the Central Terminal Building (CTB) check-in to assist with the dispatching of bags from CTB islands. Help was also sourced from security companies at the airport to carry bags to different CTB check-in counters and emergency lifts. Some staff were stationed in the basement along with ACSA management to assist.

"ACSA had ensured the full deployment of senior management and executives on the floor and/or in operations control to manage the situation caused by the system failure. We arranged for additional baggage, technical and handling staff (porters) to be deployed to the check-in areas and baggage basement area to manually move bags. These staff also worked collaboratively with airline and ground handling staff until bags were sorted, grouped and dispatched," says Delomoney.

He adds that all of these efforts are being closely supervised by ACSA's regional general manager and assistant general managers. At an ACSA network level, once bags were sent to the destination airports, ACSA mobilised additional vehicles and drivers to work with the airlines and the airlines baggage delivery services to physically deliver bags to passengers. This work was done from early morning into the late hours of the night and happened over three days, including over Christmas.

"We would like to apologise profusely to travellers who were affected by the problem, which occurred during our busiest time when large volumes of people headed to their holiday destinations to spend the festive season with friends and family," says Delomoney.

"We would also like to thank our customers for their patience during this time and assure them that the technical issue has now been fully resolved."