

Civil Aviation Authority
Aviation House
Beehive Ring Road
Crawley, West Sussex
RH6 0YR

economicregulation@caa.co.uk

Luton, 23 January 2026

easyJet Submission on CAP3202: Review of Traffic Distribution Rules 1991

Background

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the CAA's call for inputs on the UK's 1991 Traffic Distribution Rules (TDR). Given our scale in the UK and as the operator of the largest fleet at key regulated airports, including London Gatwick where we carry 46% of all traffic, easyJet has a clear interest and brings a valuable perspective in trying to ensure that the UK's regulatory framework for airports is fit for purpose and support efficient, competitive aviation markets.

easyJet's long-standing and consistent position across all European markets is that airlines should have the freedom to determine their own networks, based on where passengers want to travel. Whilst the current the UK's TDR do not directly constrain our passenger operations, we believe they represent an outdated approach. TDR undermine this principle by artificially diverting traffic away from certain airports, creating market distortions that restrict access to key airports and limit consumer choice. By reallocating traffic away from airports where demand exists, TDR reduce the efficiency of the internal market and undermine the principles of market liberalisation that have benefited consumers in the UK and Europe for decades.

We therefore support the revocation of the 1991 TDR. As the Minister for Aviation has noted, these rules are inconsistent with the Worldwide Airport Slot Guidelines (WASG) principle that slots at congested airports should be allocated in an open, fair, transparent and non-discriminatory manner.

The WASG is jointly published by IATA, Airports Council International and the Worldwide Airport Coordinators Group, and reflects collaboration between airports, airlines and slot coordinators to modernise and improve slot allocation. easyJet operates extensively at primary, congested airports and is a strong supporter of the WASG. While not perfect, the current slot regulation aligned with

the WASG remains the best long-term framework for managing scarce airport capacity, enabling airlines to enter congested markets and compete effectively.

Where airport capacity is constrained, the slot regulation ensures that slots are allocated efficiently and without discrimination, recognising that slot availability and timings are fundamental to competition. Regulatory stability aligned with the WASG benefits consumers by allowing easyJet to offer a broad network of routes, increased choice and competitive prices, while supporting connectivity. The certainty of schedules is also essential for business travel, facilitating trade and wider economic growth.

In contrast, TDR create a parallel system that introduces categories of operators who are prohibited from accessing certain airports at specific times, regardless of whether they could obtain slots through the established allocation process. This adds unnecessary regulatory complexity and directly conflicts with established slot allocation principles.

Market-based mechanisms

easyJet supports the provision of secondary trading and believes secondary trading plays an important role in slot mobility, as well as ensuring competition and choice for consumers. This allows for scarce, valuable capacity to be utilised in accordance with market demand, ensuring slots are used to maximise both consumer and economic value.

Conversely, easyJet does not support any market-based mechanisms for the primary distribution of capacity, including, but not limited to, slot auctions and/or rentals. The distribution of primary capacity should remain the responsibility of an airport's appointed Slot Co-ordinator, allowing for the allocation of capacity in accordance with the framework set out in the WASG and the UK Slot Regulation, in a non-discriminatory and consistent manner.

Slot regulation, future capacity and review timing

We understand that DfT is actively reviewing existing slot policy and exploring options for reform. Our position on slot reform naturally depends on how airport expansion will impact future capacity, and we are seeking clarity from Government in relation to this issue. Any changes should ensure that the slot framework continues to function optimally and that capacity is distributed in line with the principles of the WASG.

We recognise the rationale for reviewing the 1991 TDR once there is greater clarity on expansion and what that might mean for capacity. However, our view is that the 1991 TDR should be revoked before any release of significant new capacity. Also, the approach taken to allocate new capacity

resulting from airport expansion must be carefully considered through appropriate consultation with industry stakeholders.

Conclusion

easyJet supports the revocation of the UK's 1991 TDR and the CAA advising the Department for Transport's Secretary of State to proceed in doing so. In short, our view is that TDR create market distortions and are inconsistent with WASG principles that slots should be allocated in an open, fair, transparent and non-discriminatory manner. The WASG, developed collaboratively by airport operators, airlines and slot coordinators, remains the best long-term solution to managing scarce capacity.

We support revoking the 1991 TDR before any release of significant new capacity from airport expansion, whilst the approach to allocating that new capacity is carefully considered through consultation with industry stakeholders.