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Article — Digitized Version

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Intereconomics

Suggested Citation: Iwersen, Albrecht (1973) : Development of German air traffic, Intereconomics, ISSN 0020-5346, Verlag Weltarchiv, Hamburg, Vol. 08, Iss. 9, pp. 287-290,
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02927730>

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Development of German Air Traffic

by Albrecht Iwersen, Hamburg *

The airports in the Federal Republic of Germany have for years shown a rate of traffic increase far exceeding that of any other branch of the transport and communications industry. The result of this trend are adjustment problems particularly as far as regional air traffic, airport planning and feeder-lines from and to the airports are concerned.

The air traffic in the Federal Republic has in the recent past been subjected to considerable drags, not least among them the "work-to-rule", or "going slow" of the air-safety and control personnel on the ground. Yet, in spite of the "going slow" and setbacks in air traffic to and from Berlin (because of improvements of the facilities for surface transport), 1972, again, showed remarkable growth rates of all sections of air traffic, against the year before. They amounted to between 4.2 p.c. (total passenger traffic) and 8.8 p.c. (air freight).

Looking at the traffic development at the eleven largest German airports, the picture that reveals itself is that Frankfurt-Rhein-Main airport is still by leaps and bounds the biggest air-traffic junction within the territory of the Federal Republic. The international air traffic is in the main directed via the four large airports of Düsseldorf, Frankfurt, Hamburg and Munich. The smaller airports,

such as Bremen, Saarbrücken or Nuremberg, predominantly serve domestic flights. The Berlin airports occupy a special position; as far as traffic volume is concerned they are significantly larger than the majority of airports in the Federal Republic of Germany, but the traffic consists almost exclusively of transit flights between Berlin and the Federal Republic. However, this situation might possibly change one day on the strength of the East-West détente.

Inter-Continental Traffic

During the period 1964/1972 the passenger traffic between German and non-European airports has about trebled. By now, overseas flight destinations represent approximately 20 p.c. of the total outgoing passenger air traffic to foreign countries. The traffic to non-European destinations is

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Table 1
Traffic on German Airports in 1972

Airport	Passengers			Air freight in 1,000 kg Total	Air mail in 1,000 kg Total
	Arr. and Dep.	Transit	Total		
Berlin	5,521,803	—	5,521,803	21,929	11,108
Bremen	488,310	69,505	557,815	3,158	1,544
Düsseldorf	4,556,493	112,259	4,668,752	35,373	4,568
Frankfurt	10,849,161	762,214	11,611,375	397,833	66,448
Hamburg	3,436,151	165,239	3,601,390	31,553	9,332
Hanover	2,344,179	122,099	2,466,278	13,858	4,289
Cologne/Bonn	1,558,580	114,040	1,672,620	17,506	5,871
Munich	4,249,094	218,370	4,467,464	36,638	10,612
Nuremberg	626,781	13,460	640,241	5,202	3,014
Saarbrücken	107,234	6,987	114,221	222	—
Stuttgart	2,005,012	125,144	2,130,156	34,138	6,590
Total 1972	35,742,798	1,709,317	37,452,115	597,410	123,376
Total 1971	34,488,167	1,455,701	35,943,868	549,080	115,493
Changes in p.c. 1972/71	+ 3.6	+ 17.4	+ 4.2	+ 8.8	+ 6.8

Source: Statistical returns by Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutscher Verkehrsflughäfen (ADV) (Working Committee of German Airports) Stuttgart-Airport.

still dominated by regular flights, although a growing tendency towards all-inclusive package-tours is clearly perceptible.

Table 2
Overseas Passenger Traffic (Dep.) 1969–1971
(in 1,000)

	1969	1970	1971
America (North + South)	847	984	1,019
Africa	138	184	294
Asia	142	180	215
Australia	9	14	14

Source: Statistical returns by Federal Statistical Office, Wiesbaden, Series H, Air Transportation, for 1969, 1970 and 1971.

The largest part of the passenger traffic by air from Germany goes via the North Atlantic route. In 1971 856,000 (1970: 837,000) persons flew to the USA – a growth rate of 2 p.c. The increase of persons en route, by air, to Canada was, during the same two years, even 7 p.c. The greatest upswing in overseas passenger traffic by air was recorded – like in previous years – in the case of destinations on the African Continent. This development is the result foremostly of the persistently growing tourists' traffic to North African territories, especially Tunisia. But even the regular flight traffic to Africa went up from 102,000 passengers in 1970 to 128,000 in 1971, thus by 23.3 p.c. The air passenger traffic to South and Central America also showed a comparatively remarkable increase, by 16.5 p.c. The most important destinations were in this case Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia.

According to forecasts, especially by the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutscher Verkehrsflughäfen"

– "ADV" (Working Committee of German Airports), German air traffic will further expand strongly. This development will bring in its wake a particularly intensive further concentration on the airports of Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Munich and Hamburg. These estimates, then, were the reason for the building of vast extensions of existing airports (Frankfurt) or entirely new ones (Munich-Erding und Hamburg-Kaltenkirchen). Once the necessity of such works was recognised, the Federal Government had been, and still is, granting investment aid towards the costs. Otherwise, the various airport companies and the Federal Lands, which in most cases are joint-partners of the former, would have been overstrained financially. As things are, the expected strong expansion of air traffic in Germany entails even more complex problems than investment support.

Expansion Obstacles

The development towards larger units of air transportation, the step from normal versions and "stretched" ones to super-planes brings – quite apart from the technically solvable problems – first of all the question as to the performance limits of the ground installations. It is feared that many ground installations on German airports, however overdimensional they may still appear today, could very soon prove to be bottlenecks. Experience has taught that traffic development has, in advance calculations, frequently been underestimated so that also in the future capacity limits might be reached quicker than expected.

A further bottleneck circumstance in Germany is, similar to most other populated developed countries, the handling capacity of the air space.

Table 3
German Airports: The Development of Local Passenger Traffic
1960–1980

Airport	Passengers (arr. + dep.) in 1,000								
	1960	1965	1970	1971	1972	1975 *		1980 *	
						min.	max.	min.	max.
Berlin (West-)	1,535	3,152	5,538	6,114	5,522	7,391	8,399	9,164	11,452
Bremen	56	217	431	479	488	792	894	1,396	1,720
Düsseldorf	782	1,691	3,520	4,196	4,556	5,678	6,419	9,568	11,827
Frankfurt	1,904	4,422	8,829	9,989	10,849	15,413	17,417	24,824	30,696
Hamburg	883	1,698	2,988	3,316	3,436	4,666	5,335	7,862	9,829
Hanover	533	1,025	2,363	2,556	2,344	3,770	4,400	6,340	8,120
Cologne/Bonn	208	588	1,277	1,468	1,559	3,317	3,809	6,274	7,863
Munich	690	1,525	3,361	3,794	4,249	5,421	6,086	9,216	11,314
Nuremberg	105	263	511	589	626	1,024	1,104	1,837	2,165
Stuttgart	248	671	1,552	1,844	2,005	2,640	3,032	4,329	5,345
Total	6,944	15,252	30,370	34,375	35,634	50,112	56,895	80,810	100,331

* Forecast by: Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutscher Verkehrsflughäfen (ADV) (Working Committee of German Airports); Die Verkehrsentwicklung, die Ausbauplanung und der Investitionsbedarf der deutschen Verkehrsflughäfen bis 1977 (Development of traffic, extension planning and need for capital expenditure of German airports until 1977).

There is, on the one hand, the continuously greater traffic density, and, on the other, the air space which cannot be enlarged. The answer to the question as to the air space capacity can only be found in a supra-national air channels co-ordination and a directing of movements resulting in maximum use of air traffic routes and channels mainly by means of interlocking streams of traffic. On a national basis the first, if only relatively small step of air timetable co-ordination was taken in Germany in 1971 by the setting-up of a Commission for an Air Traffic Co-ordinator by the Federal Minister of Transport.

Regional Air Traffic

The domestic air traffic is a rather controversial aspect of German air traffic policy. This part of German air traffic has for a long time been the cinderella of the development because the German Lufthansa having put the emphasis of its efforts until the early or middle sixties on international traffic and looked upon internal traffic at best only as feeder for its international routes. A number of privately owned regional air companies, partly operated independently and partly as Lufthansa subsidiaries, tried to fill this gap. The over-all result was a but little remunerative internal air traffic net struggling on many routes against the rather fierce competition of good, well organised, and fast, surface connexions.

Also in this case, coordination and harmonisation are required. So, in 1970 the "Commission for the Internal Air Traffic" was given the brief to submit recommendations for the long-term purposeful, structural, practical and organisational formation of the German internal air traffic and thus, simultaneously, to contribute informative and practical basic material for a programme of traffic channels for all means of conveyance. The report, recently submitted, contains some recommendations of importance for the future:

☐ in view of the availability, in Germany, of adequate and fast moving means of surface communication, the installation of regional airports and the inauguration of new air connections should be kept within very narrow limits;

☐ the internal air traffic should earn its entire operating and administrative costs which means that a cost-orientated price-policy is essential;

☐ the existing air companies should continue to maintain regional traffic but aim at the gradual setting up of a unified company for the regional air traffic.

Particularly the last point has met with criticism because, foremostly, of fears that even such a monopoly company would be no guarantee of a profitable operating of the internal German air

traffic. What would be required towards this end would be a simultaneous narrowing of the capacity offer which, however, appears to be rather problematic, as far as its realisation is concerned, for reasons of local politics. It should be the aim of regional air traffic in future to gear its policy on becoming a purposeful supplementation of the railways net-work thus pursuing, and taking into consideration, overall-economic aspects more than hitherto.

Traffic Bottlenecks on the Ground

The sacrifice of time caused by the feeder-traffic on the ground is a special problem which does not exist to the same degree in large countries such as most less developed countries. The relatively large time gain, resulting today from high speeds of modern passenger planes, is reduced — and often quite considerably, at that — through waiting time and handling time on the ground as well as the time it takes to reach the airport. Particularly in the Federal Republic, all this represents a serious bottleneck factor for the future development. The building of the four new and large airports will result in an improvement of waiting periods and the time the dispatch and clearance of passengers takes, but there still re-

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mains the big problem of the feeder-traffic especially in the large congestion areas.

There have in the past been demands for railway links and direct connections between airports and the Autobahnsystem. This concept, however, is not without problems of its own. An air passenger facing the alternative of "public transport or individual transport" will more often than not prefer his own private transport for the journey to the airport. This will at once reduce the chance of an adequate capacity-utilisation of public transport and also certainly not lessen the loss of time through traffic congestion on the roads, particularly during rush hours in the agglomeration centres. So far, no satisfactory concept has been found for the elimination of this bottleneck-factor, which is an obstacle for the air traffic specially over short and medium distances. Remembering that the average distance of German domestic and international flight-routes is only something between 450 and 500 miles, it becomes obvious that a solution of this problem is an urgent matter. Within the sphere of such flight distances, the time wasted on the ground may well amount to half of the total travelling duration.

The consequence of ceaselessly expanding air traffic is already now a dangerously growing traffic density in the air space available above Germany. Also those responsible for flight safety have repeatedly pointed at this threat. Should this development continue to the same extent as it has prevailed up to now, the air space capacity would be exhausted relatively soon unless, of course, supra-national authorities for the directing of air traffic were put up. The airports, too, might have to face the exhaustion of their taking-in capacity in the foreseeable future, especially if and when the building of new airports or the extension of existing ones would have to be postponed because of financial difficulties or, what might very well happen, for reasons of environment protection.

In densely populated areas and therefore also in the Federal Republic of Germany, the crux of the development problems is to be found on the ground. Only when an appropriate feeder-conveyance especially for the large airports has been successfully developed and put to use, will it still be possible to maintain a further on strongly expanding air traffic.

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