

EU to stop 'ghost flights' in coronavirus fightback

March 10 2020, by Marc Burleigh



Airlines struggling with a collapse in bookings because of the new coronavirus have taken to flying empty planes to keep their airport slots

The EU is to act "very rapidly" to help airlines struggling from the new coronavirus outbreak by proposing a law to stop "ghost flights" to keep airport slots, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said

Tuesday.

"The coronavirus outbreak had a major impact on European and international aviation industry. We see that the situation is deteriorating on a daily basis and traffic is expected to decline further," she said.

"This is why the Commission will put forward very rapidly legislation regarding the so-called airport slots.... it will also decrease emissions by avoiding the so-called 'ghost flights' when airlines fly almost empty planes simply to keep their slot," she said.

"Slots" are reserved take-off or landing authorisations that airports allocate to airlines. Currently, if an airline does not operate a [flight](#) in its allocated slot it can lose it to a competitor.

With the abrupt drop-off in passenger numbers due to the expanding coronavirus crisis, many airlines have taken to flying empty planes—"ghost flights"—to ensure they do not lose their slots.

Von der Leyen's proposal means the Commission would put forward an emergency EU draft law to allow airlines to keep those slots without operating ghost flights while the virus emergency goes on.

Such legislation would have to go to the European Parliament for adoption, and then to the European Council representing the EU's 27 member states for approval.

The Commission president said the measure would be temporary.



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the measure to stop 'ghost flights' would be temporary

Big economic hit

The initiative, she said, was just one example of a raft of measures the EU executive was looking at to alleviate the impact of the new coronavirus, which is proving both deadly and economically damaging as it spreads.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) last week estimated that losses in revenue for airlines due to the new coronavirus could range from \$63 billion (55 billion euros) to \$113 billion, depending on whether the spread of the virus was contained.

It and the European Airport Coordinators Association have recommended that rules governing slots be suspended while the industry copes with the sudden collapse in passenger demand and the axing of services to the worst-hit countries and regions.

The European Union has already enacted such temporary suspensions in the past, during the SARS epidemic in 2003 and in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States.

With Italy declaring a nationwide lockdown to slow the virus's spread, European airlines Ryanair, Norwegian and British Airways have announced cancelled flights.

German airline Lufthansa said last week it will slash its capacity in half in the coming weeks because of the "[drastic decline](#)" in bookings.

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