An industry call to follow IATA resolution 751 when issuing baggage license plate numbers (LPN)

Background

The increase in passenger traffic globally is a positive trend for the industry. This increase translates to a proportional growth of baggage being transported daily throughout the world. This positive prospect however comes with some challenges as it adds pressure to airport operations, resources and infrastructure. One way to tackle the challenges is through standardization of processes that will result to an efficient operation. The industry has been using the 10 digit license plate number (LPN) concept for a long time as described in resolutions 740, 751 and 769. Nevertheless, there is lack of consistency on the implementation due to inconsistent application of the concept and interpretation across the industry. One such example is the failure to use all the 10 digit license plate numbers efficiently. This inconsistency is causing a challenge by creating duplicate baggage tag numbers as they are repeated within 72 hours or less. Some departure control system (DCS) providers are also unable to support airlines with their call to efficiently utilize all the 10 digits . So the baggage working group has decided to issue this communication as a reminder to the industry to use all 10 digit Licence plate numbers including all the numbers from 0-9 in the leading digit without being limited to 0 & 1and 2 as mandated in Resolutions 740, 751 and 769.

What does the standard say?

Resolution 751 states that, for the carriage of interline baggage, Members shall use a baggage identification number that is composed of all three components (Leading Digit, Baggage Tag Issuer Code and six-digit serial number) as defined in Resolution 740/5.1.2, and that only this baggage identification number shall be used in all baggage messaging and this entire number shall remain unchanged during the entire journey and in all uses.

Resolution 740 describes in detail the components of the LPN and their translation. As mandated in Resolution 740b, number 0 is to be used for interline baggage only as lead digit 1 for fall back tag , 2 for interline expediate tag and 3-9 for interline and online use. Stakeholders have the possibility of extending the LPN by as many as 7 million unique tag numbers through the usage of lead digit numbers ranging from 3 to 9 and without being restricted to numbers 0-2. Numbers from 2nd to 4th position are composed of the three digit baggage tag issuer code assigned by IATA to carriers or non airlines company. The issuance of this 3 digit numeric bag tag issuer code is described in Resolution 769. The last components from position 5 to 10 are the six digit serial numbers generated by the departure control system.

The airline baggage tag issuer code is described in detail in Resolution 769. A combination of this code with the tag serial number will be used to identify uniquely each piece of checked baggage throughout the baggage handling process according to the license plate number concept. A set of codes will be assigned to all airlines who issue interline baggage tags by IATA. They will also be required by airlines who may not issue interline tags, but who operate at airports which have automated baggage systems based on the licence plate and bar code technology. Tags may be pre-printed or issued by bag tag printers in response to an automated check-in transaction.

An airline may apply for an additional set of codes when it has identified an operational requirement. This may include the following scenarios:

1) When it allows use of its departure control system by handling agents, and wishes to discriminate between tags issued for its own purpose and those issued to handling agents.

2) When the volume of baggage being tagged means the departure control system will run through the available serial numbers in three days or less, and cause the creation of duplicate tag numbers in automated baggage systems.

3) When a non-airline company owns and operates its own departure control system, it will be assigned a set of codes.

Way forward

Various challenges are arising out of using non-standard license plate numbers. The industry should make sure to comply with the standards as outlined in Resolution 740, 751 and 769 and make proper usage of all numbers available to be used as leading digits of the LPN without being restricted to 0, 1 and 2. The use of numeric values 3 to 9 as leading digits will extend available tag series stocks in the DCS and will successfully mitigate the tag duplication problem observed at big baggage traffic airports. All Departure control system (DCS), BRS and BHS providers should ensure that the relevant standards are followed, support the industry and ensure that their DCS is able to make use of the other numeric values in the range of 3-9 as the leading digits.

Conclusion

The standards on the usage of the license plate number concept are covered in detail in Resolutions 740, 751 and 769. The procedures are clear and straight forward and the process of acquiring additional baggage tag issuer code are well described in the mentioned resolutions. The resolution emphasizes the need to follow the outlined standards to avoid any tag duplication issues or confusions. The baggage working group issues this statement to remind the industry to adhere to the standards when issuing a license plate number.