

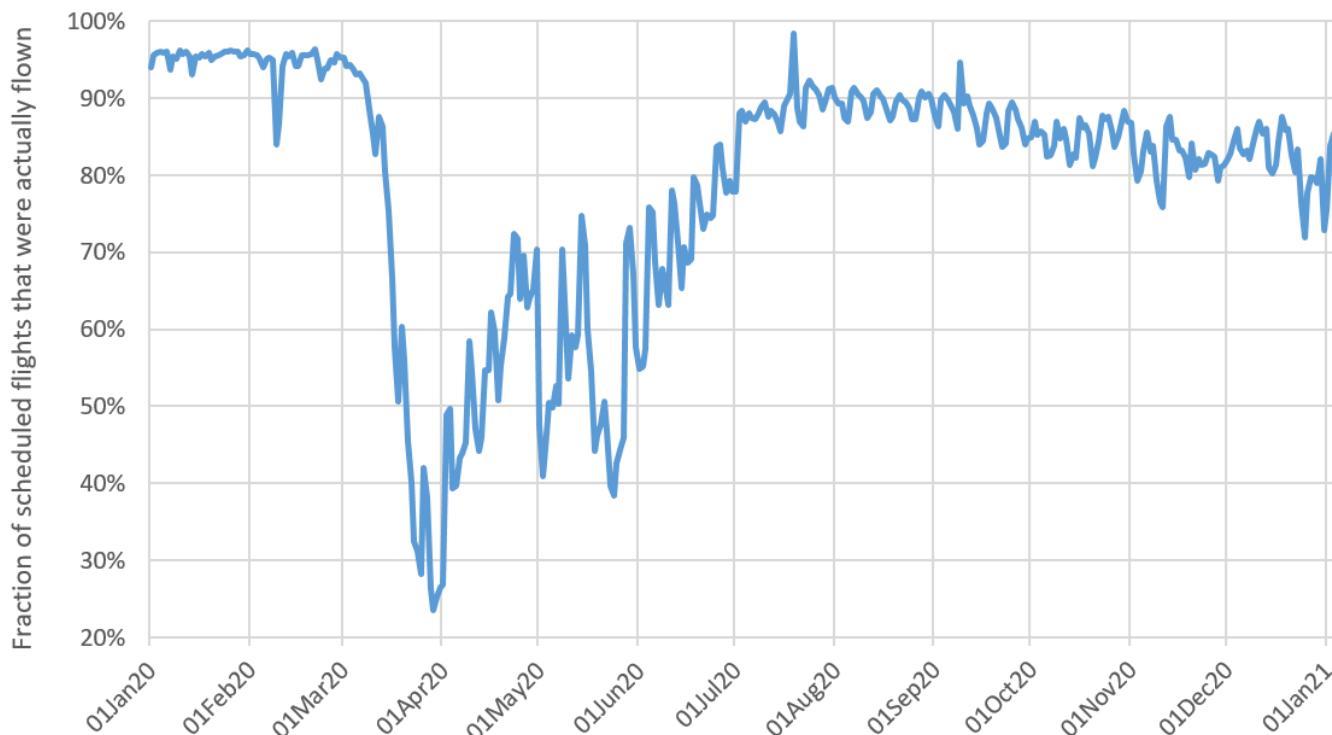
EUROCONTROL Data Snapshot

Airline schedules during 2020 were a weaker guide to flights than usual



12 January 2021

The published airline schedules were only a weak guide to flights in 2020



Source: EUROCONTROL

In normal times the published airline schedules are a pretty good indicator of how many scheduled flights there will be – indeed often analysts use them as a proxy for real flights. Inevitably, there are a few cancellations on the day (typically 1-2% according to our [CODA reports](#)) but the vast majority of scheduled flights do actually fly.

These are not normal times. One stark indicator of the volatility of COVID-related travel restrictions in the last 10 months is the fraction of scheduled flights which were actually operated, even in the week immediately after the schedule was published. As the lockdown spread across Europe, a huge gap opened between scheduled and flown: the low-point being just 24% flown on 29 March 2020.

Gradually, over the summer, the situation improved, though it took until late July to stabilise at 85-90%. Better, but still lower than 'normal' values. The graph also shows a dip in the middle of each week: this is probably because scheduled frequencies are higher then, meaning that airlines can cancel while leaving passengers with other options to reach their destinations.

The winter brought yet more, rapidly-changing travel restrictions in response to the second wave of COVID infection. One result of this is evident from the graph: the gap between schedules and actual flights has widened again, dropping to near 80% on some days in October and then staying that way until the end of the year.

The graph shows that, however often airlines update their plans, they're out of date within days. So during the pandemic the published schedules are a weaker guide to actual flights than usual.

Technical bits: We compare the schedules published each Thursday for the following week, with actual flights recorded by us based on flight plan and radar data. Data shown are for all flights in the Eurocontrol Network Manager area of responsibility.

