

A Statistical Separation Standard and Risk-Throughput Modeling of the Aircraft Landing
Process

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By

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to independent thinkers, whose thoughts, research and words has been bringing wisdom to peace and human well-being. I shall dedicate the dissertation to those who have ever encouraged, invigorated or tried to improve Human Rights at GMU. The last, but not the least, I shall dedicate my dissertation to honesty, peace and freedom of speech without which no healthy and objective research can be maintained.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	VII
LIST OF FIGURES	VIII
LIST OF ABBRIVIATIONS	IX
ABSTRACT	X
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 GROWTH OF DEMAND FOR AIR TRANSPORTATION	1
1.2 RUNWAYS AS SCARCE AND VALUABLE RESOURCES	4
1.3 SEPARATION STANDARDS	5
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS	8
1.5 METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW	9
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	12
CHAPTER 3 STATISTICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LANDING PROCESS	26
3.1 BACKGROUND	26
3.2 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISTRIBUTION FITTING	28
3.2.1 Database Structure and Sample Extraction Procedure	29
3.2.2 Data Preparation	29
3.2.3 Algorithm to Extract Samples	35
3.3 LANDING STATISTICS	37
3.4 PEAK PERIOD IAT, LTI, AND IAD PROBABILITY DISTRIBUTIONS	40
3.5 ESTIMATION OF RUNWAY OCCUPANCY TIME	44
3.6 ESTIMATION OF SRO PROBABILITY	47
3.6.1 Empirical Method	49
3.6.2 Theoretical Method	50
3.7 CHAPTER CONCLUSION	52
CHAPTER 4 STATISTICAL SEPARATION STANDARDS	54
4.1 THE FINAL APPROACH PROCESS	55
4.1.1 Notation	55
4.2 AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL PROCESSES	56
4.2.1 Statistical Process Control of the Aircraft Approach Process	58
4.2.2 Landing Risks in the Final Approach and Runway	59

4.3	STATISTICAL SEPARATION STANDARDS	61
4.3.1	A Mathematical Model for the Separation.....	61
4.3.2	Example	64
4.4	METHODOLOGY TO SET A TARGET VALUE AND LOWER CONTROL LIMIT	66
4.4.1	Algorithm.....	70
4.4.2	A Monitoring Mechanism.....	72
4.4.3	Numerical Example	72
4.4.4	Algorithm Illustration	73
4.4.5	Monitoring Mechanism Illustration	75
4.5	EFFECT OF REDUCING SEPARATION VARIANCE ON THE RISK	75
4.6	CHAPTER CONCLUSION	78
CHAPTER 5 MAXIMIZING THE SYSTEM OUTPUT.....		81
5.1	BACKGROUND	81
5.1.1	Notation.....	84
5.2	GO-AROUND ENFORCED (RISK-FREE) LANDING	85
5.3	PROBABILITY OF GO-AROUND ASSUMING NO WAKE VORTEX EFFECT.....	88
5.4	TOTAL PROBABILITY OF GO-AROUND WITH WAKE VORTEX EFFECT.....	90
5.5	MAXIMIZING THE NET ECONOMIC BENEFIT	92
5.5.1	Properties of $g(\omega; C/B)$	95
5.5.2	Special Case: Maximizing Runway Throughput	96
5.5.3	Illustration.....	96
5.6	OPTIMAL SOLUTION WITHOUT WAKE-VORTEX EFFECT	97
5.7	OPTIMAL SOLUTION WITH WAKE-VORTEX EFFECT	98
5.8	OPTIMAL OPERATIONS FOR A GIVEN FLEET MIX.....	101
5.8.1	Solution of the Model	104
5.9	EFFECT OF REDUCING SEPARATION VARIANCE ON OPTIMAL THROUGHPUT	105
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION.....		107
APPENDIX A. PROOFS AND DERIVATIONS.....		110
APPENDIX B. INSTRUMENT APPROACH PROCEDURE OF RUNWAY 21L		112
REFERENCES.....		113
CURRICULUM VITAE.....		118

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
Table 1.1. IFR approach in-trail, threshold separation minima (nm)	6
Table 3.1. Number of peak time landings observed; Feb. 2-8, 2003	32
Table 3.2. Total number of landing samples on runway 21L	37
Table 3.3. Follow-lead aircraft transition matrix in peak periods; Feb. 2003 data	40
Table 3.4. IFR approach in-trail threshold separation minima (nmi)	41
Table 3.5. Estimated landing distributions under IMC	41
Table 3.6. Estimated landing distributions under VMC	42
Table 3.7. One-lag and two-lag correlation coefficients for the variables under IMC	43
Table 3.8. <i>ROT</i> in peak periods for landing runways; Feb 2-8, 2003 samples	47
Table 4.1. Variance-reduction scenarios	65
Table 5.1. Optimal values for different safe WV thresholds and <i>C/B</i>	100

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
Figure 1.1. Passenger Miles vs. GDP	2
Figure 3.1. Simplified DTW airport diagram (FAA 2006).....	28
Figure 3.2. Landing and exit tracks of three large aircraft on 21L	33
Figure 3.3. Landings on runway 21L (scale of Y-axis is distorted)	34
Figure 3.4. Arrival rate to runway 21L; Feb. 2-8, 2003, local time.....	38
Figure 3.5. Arrival rate (observed minus ASPM) per quarter hour in Feb 2-8, 2003.....	39
Figure 3.6. One-lag scatter plot of peak-IMC period <i>LTI</i> of 3 nm pairs.....	42
Figure 3.7. Histogram and distribution of peak period <i>LTI</i> 3-nmi under IMC	43
Figure 3.8. Histogram and distributions of peak period 4-nmi <i>LTI</i> under VMC.....	44
Figure 3.9. <i>ROT</i> under VMC (895 samples) vs. IMC (590 samples); Feb 2003 data	46
Figure 3.10. <i>ROT</i> of aircraft <i>k</i> versus <i>LTI</i> between aircraft <i>k</i> and <i>k</i> +1; Feb 2003 data.....	49
Figure 3.11. Probability distributions of <i>ROT</i> and <i>LTI3</i> and their overlap.....	51
Figure 4.1. Feedback loop on an air transportation process	57
Figure 4.2. A typical final approach process	59
Figure 4.3. A buffer spacing added by ATC <i>j</i> to the minimum separation.....	62
Figure 4.4. Observable and non-observable distributions	67
Figure 4.5. Effect of Target Value on the overlap size of <i>LTI</i> and <i>ROT</i>	70
Figure 5.1. Go-around procedures on the glide slope.....	85
Figure 5.2. Total $P\{GA\}$ and 10 times of $dp/d\omega$	90
Figure 5.3. PDFs of WV strength and <i>LTI</i> with illustrated WV safe threshold x_0	91
Figure 5.4. $g(\omega;C/B)$ of 3nm Pairs for $C/B = 0, 1, 2, \dots, 128$; WV effect included	99
Figure 5.5. $g(\omega;C/B)$ of 4nmi Pairs For $C/B = 0, 1, 2, \dots, 128$; WV effect included	101
Figure 5.6. Effect of reducing <i>LTI3</i> and <i>LTI4</i> standard deviations to a percentage of their original values.....	106

LIST OF ABBRIVIATIONS

CDF	cumulative distribution function
DTW	Detroit metropolitan Wayne county airport
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
FAF	final approach fix
GA	go-around
<i>IAD</i>	inter arrival distance
IAF	initial approach fix
IAP	instrument approach procedure
<i>IAT</i>	inter arrival time to FAF
IFR	instrument flight rule
IMC	instrument meteorological condition
<i>LTI</i>	landing time interval to the runway threshold
MAP	missed approach point
PDF	probability distribution function
<i>ROT</i>	runway occupancy time
SRO	simultaneous runway occupancy
TRACON	terminal radar approach control
WV	wake vortex
nmi	nautical mile
s	second

ABSTRACT

A STATISTICAL SEPARATION STANDARD AND RISK-THROUGHPUT MODELING OF THE AIRCRAFT LANDING PROCESS

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In the context of a high demand for runways as important scarce resources of the national air transportation system, this dissertation is concerned with the problem of determining the best separation between aircraft to maximize the *output* of the *landing system*. The risks of *wake vortex hazard* on the following aircraft and *simultaneous runway occupancy* shall be controlled. The following specific questions are addressed:

1. What are the stochastic characteristics of the aircraft landing process?
2. What parameters should a separation standard include?
3. How should the optimal levels of separation standard parameters be decided to maximize the system output?

The first question is answered by statistical analysis of aircraft landing track data using “multilateration surveillance system” at Detroit airport (DTW). We present probability distribution functions of Landing Time Intervals to the runway threshold, and aircraft Runway Occupancy Time, among other distributions. We suggest that the current

“minimum separation” standards for a given type of follow lead aircraft, e.g. a large aircraft following another large aircraft, (under Instrument Flight Rule) should be replaced by statistical separation standards (SSS). Our proposed standard, for a given type of follow-lead pair, specifies a target separation value, a lower specification limit, and a standard for the variance of the process.

The optimal level of target separation, which defines the optimal level of the system output, depends on the cost of avoiding the risks and the benefits gained from closer and more frequent landings. An operational procedure will be proposed to avoid the wake vortex hazard. We present optimization models to maximize the system output given cost and benefit factors. The models also provide a framework to estimate runway landing capacity (defined as average sustainable risk-free/safe landing) taking into account the uncertainty of the landing process. The capacity estimation is critical for planning and scheduling purposes. Estimated effects/benefits of reducing variance, of Landing Time Interval, on landing capacity are presented.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, we studied the landing and approach process to a single independent runway which is solely used for landing operations. The goal is to take the most advantage of runways as a scarce and increasingly demanded resource of the air transportation network. Increasing utilization is achievable by reducing aircraft separation spacing; however, it has trade offs with risking landing safety and human lives. Through this research, we initiated several steps to manage this trade off and to maximize the utilization:

1. We analyzed stochastic properties of the landing process to obtain estimates for the PDF's of inter-arrival distances, landing-time intervals at FAF and runway threshold, and runway occupancy times. From the observed data, the frequency of simultaneous runway occupancy was on the order of 10^{-3} . These results were obtained through processing of multilateration surveillance system data at Detroit airport (DTW).
2. As separation standard parameters, we proposed a statistical separation standard, which includes a *target value* and a *lower control limit* for separation of a given type of aircraft pair. The proposed standard can reduce the variability of the landing separation. Such a standard has the possibility to lead to a quicker realization of safety degradation before observing a major incident. In addition, we demonstrated

- how specifying different levels of target separations leads to a trade-off between risk and throughput.
3. These first steps formed the basic building blocks for a model to optimize throughput level without compromising safety, i.e. without increasing the risk. To maintain safety, we proposed a go-around procedure to avoid wake vortex incidents and to assure the landing safety. These go-around (or missed approach) procedures shall be enforced for the sake of safety.
 4. Under the enforced go-around procedures, shortening the average separation spacing will increase the go-around rate. We suggested that despite the increased go-around rate, the overall landing throughput rate can still be increased. One optimization model developed to mimic this dynamic of the system. This model is solved for the peak period landing distributions of Detroit airport, and the results supported our hypothesis of increased throughput.
 5. The aforementioned optimization model estimates *landing capacity* of the runway, with or, hypothetically, without the presence of wake vortex effect. The maximum achievable safe throughput for 3 nmi pairs, mainly large-large aircraft, is 39.4 per hour when wake vortex effect is ignored. This maximum reduces to 36.5 when 55 sec is considered as the safe wake vortex missed approach threshold. The difference between these estimates provides a logical framework to estimate the economic effect of wake vortex phenomenon in the system. Using these figures we roughly estimated the cost of WV phenomenon (for Detroit airport case assuming two landing runways and 10 hours of peak period per day) as about 10,600 landings of large aircraft per

- year. This translates to WV cost of tens of millions of dollars per year in a moderately busy airport.
6. We hypothesized that maximizing the throughput (by adjusting the average separation spacing) does not necessarily assure the most economic use of the runway. Another model developed to mimic these economic dynamics of the approach operations accounting for the go-around cost (to all economic beneficiaries) and the benefit of every successful landing (to all economic beneficiaries). System beneficiaries include airlines, passengers, airports, employees, etc. We showed that economically optimal level of operations depends on cost to benefit ratio rather than depending on specific values of go-around cost and successful landing benefit. This validated the hypothesis.
 7. We extended the optimization models, which described in conclusions 5 and 6, to obtain the optimized level of landing operations for a given landing fleet mix.
 8. We discussed and demonstrated the effect of reducing separation variance on the landing risks, go-around rate, and on the optimal level of landing operations (or throughputs).

We illustrated the methodologies for specific pairs of follow-lead aircraft (using landing distributions of Detroit airport) without loss of generality. Numerical results further validated the methodologies.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Babak Ghalebsaz Jeddi received his BS degree in Industrial Engineering (IE) in 1994. While in undergraduate program, he co-founded and established the first technical journal of Industrial Engineering and Operations Research (OR) in Iran, which has been managed and operated by students. After obtaining his degree in IE, he worked as a Project Control expert, Strategic Planning expert and Strategic Planning Supervisor while continuing his graduate studies. In addition to IE and OR, his academic studies include courses in Master of Business Administration. He has done consulting in the areas of quality and productivity engineering, including ISO 2000 quality standards. His research interests are in uncertainty, probabilistic and optimization modeling of service and manufacturing systems. He considers economic aspects as critical part of his pragmatic research. His papers and innovative ideas have been awarded in international conferences.