

# **CEO INTERVIEW**

Alaska Air Group's **Brad Tilden** 

# **CRISIS** MANAGEMENT

IATA chief's COVID priorities

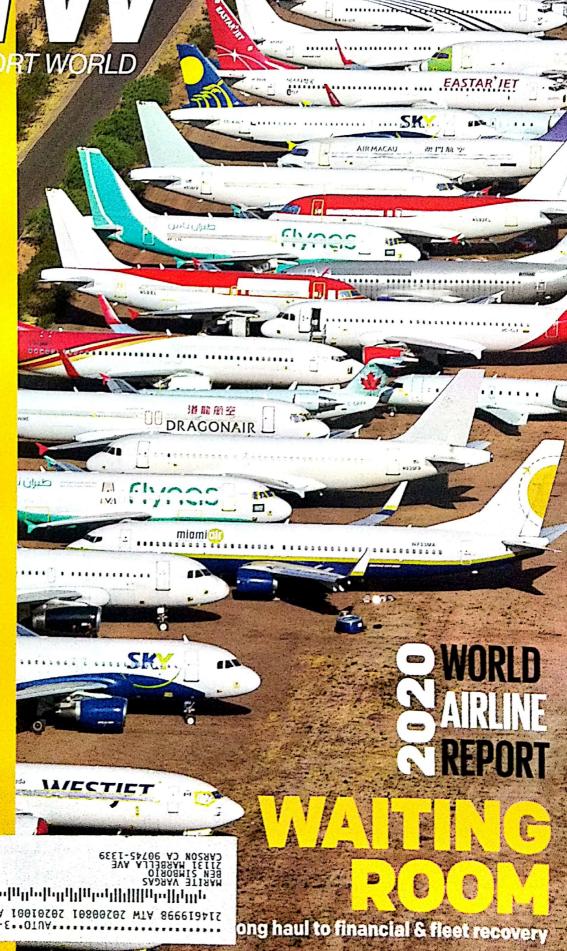
# **ECO-POLICY**

Carbon pricing and fuel costs

# **ANALYSIS**

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Mixed messages on flying safety



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# 16 ON THE COVER 2020 WORLD AIRLINE REPORT

COVID-19 is the airline industry's chance to think differently.

by Karen Walker

**PLUS:** Regional analyses, and world airline traffic, financial and fleet data.

#### **FEATURES**

10 CORSIA COSTS Climate policy, not oil

markets, increasingly sets future fuel charges.

by Henry Canaday

**14** A LONG SHADOW

IATA chief remains optimistic despite grueling recovery road. by Karen Walker

#### **DEPARTMENTS**

- 3 Editorial The Second Half by Karen Walker
- 6 Analysis
  Mixed Messages
  Flying remains safe,
  but who's listening?
  by Karen Walker

7 Quotables Best quotes heard from industry leaders

8 CEO Interview Working to a Plan Brad Tilden

> Alaska Air Group by Kuren Walker

49 Sustainability Report

Moving forward on eco-initiatives by Linda Blachly

**51** News Briefs

Manufacturers Leasing Market Boeing's proposed MAX training includes lessons learned

**53** Customer Services

53 Advertisers' Index

On The Cover: Aircraft in storage at Pinal Airpark, Arizona. Photo: Joe Pries

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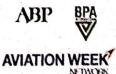
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## Editorial



**Karen Walker** | Editor-in-Chief *karen.walker@informa.com* 

# The Second Half

eeling in March from the suddenness and depth of the COVID-19 crisis, the air transport industry at least cautiously believed that the second half of 2020 would see the beginnings of a turnaround.

That prospect was looking highly questionable as of mid-July, when coronavirus cases and deaths were surging in places that included Brazil, Colombia, India, South Africa and, most shockingly, the US.

Optimism for a pickup in the US domestic market—the world's largest until China's market took that title this year—are fading. Domestic air travel traffic in the US sank to 95% of 2019 levels in April, then improved to 72% by early July. US carriers began filling out their August and September schedules.

But virus spikes in states across the country—prompting quarantine rules by other states trying to prevent reinfection—had American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, United Airlines and others applying the brakes to their restoration plans.

International flying remains at low to almost zero.

Government quarantines are a huge deterrence to travel and should be a last resort measure only after airbridges, health screenings, travel sanitization precautions and contact tracing have been fully explored as reasonable alternatives.

Even so, people will not fly and businesses will not support employee travel to high-risk areas. Conventions and exhibitions that had been rescheduled from the spring to fall or winter are being canceled or turned into virtual events, no air ticket required.

For as long as governments are unable or unwilling to take control of the virus, airlines' ability to stimulate a desire to fly will be severely limited. That is especially true of business traffic.

Governments must recognize that failure to control COVID brings a double cost of citizens' lives and economic ruin. In such an environment, the global air transport system is unsustainable. For as long as a country's virus numbers are rising, that government should provide or continue to provide financial aid, directly as loans or ownership stakes and indirectly in tax and fees relief.

The alternative will be that a country may ultimately stamp out COVID, but its airlines will be defunct or irreparably weakened. And without that travel conduit, trade and tourism will be wiped out as competitor countries that emerged early from COVID get a head start in their economy restorations.

Providing safe flights is the air transport industry's responsibility. Digging the world out of this virus catastrophe is not. **ATW** 



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