

Major Data Broker Sells Airline Passenger Data to the Government in Secret Deal

Posted on June 11, 2025 by Hal Turing



Many travelers expect a lack of privacy when flying, given TSA scans, baggage searches, and in-flight recordings. However, what most passengers don't anticipate is that their detailed flight information, including credit card details, is being sold to the government by the very airlines they trust to get them to their destination.

Unfortunately, this seems to be the case, as several major airlines have provided comprehensive passenger data to a specific government agency while working to keep this arrangement under wraps. Here's a breakdown of the data being provided, how it's being kept secret, and the government agency benefiting from this information.

Data Broker Sells Information to the Government

Airlines Reporting Corporation (ARC), a data broker owned by major airlines, including Air Canada, Air France, Alaska Airlines, American Airlines, Delta, JetBlue, Lufthansa, Southwest, and United, plays a significant role in this data-sharing operation. ARC, which manages ticket settlement services for over 240 airlines, has been sharing sensitive travel data with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), a division of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), through a contract effective from June 2024 through 2029.

The data shared includes:

- Passenger names
- Full flight itineraries
- Financial details from passengers, including credit card information

A Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) released by DHS shows that over a billion records have been collected over a 39-month period, updated daily with ticket sales. DHS can search this data using criteria like passenger names, airlines, and credit card information, but it excludes tickets sold directly by airlines. Data from travel agencies like Expedia is included instead.

Airlines' Efforts to Keep This Secret

While ARC has been transparent about its data-sharing with the government, it has gone to great lengths to keep this information hidden from the public. Its contract explicitly requests that CBP not disclose ARC as the data provider unless legally compelled, such as by a court order or subpoena.

Despite claims that Customs and Border Protection requires this data for law enforcement purposes, privacy advocates and civil rights experts have raised concerns about its implications for travelers. As Senator Ron Wyden stated, "The big airlines — through a shady data broker that they own called ARC — are selling the government bulk access to Americans' sensitive information, revealing where they fly and the credit card they used."

Lack of Oversight and Potential Consequences

While DHS defends this arrangement as necessary for supporting law enforcement, civil liberties groups worry about the government's ability to access bulk data without a warrant. Since data brokers typically don't need a warrant to sell information to the government, this could result in significant privacy concerns for passengers.

Although public outrage might follow this revelation, it's unclear whether passengers can do anything to prevent their information from being sold to the government in this manner.

This covert data-sharing practice raises questions about privacy, the role of corporations in government surveillance, and whether enough is being done to protect consumers from the potential misuse of their personal data.

□

Related News: <https://airguide.info/category/air-travel-business/travel-health-security/safety/>

Sources: AirGuide Business airguide.info, bing.com, thetreet.com

