# British Airways credits AI innovations for record punctuality at Heathrow



The chief executive of British Airways has signalled a significant turnaround in the airline’s operations, attributing improvements in performance to innovative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. Sean Doyle described the impact of these advancements as “game-changing,” particularly as the airline grapples with its long-standing reputation for operational difficulties following the disruptions of the pandemic. In the first quarter of 2025, a remarkable 86 per cent of British Airways flights from Heathrow airport were reported to have departed on time, marking the airline's best-ever performance in this regard.

This substantial progress comes in the wake of a £100 million investment aimed at bolstering operational resilience, which included hiring an additional 600 staff members specifically to manage challenges at Heathrow. Doyle emphasized the focus on improving controllable factors, stating, “The tech colleagues have at their fingertips has been a real game-changer for performance.” The investments made have encompassed not only personnel but also critical updates to IT systems, which have historically plagued the airline with issues, including notable failures in 2017, 2019, and 2022.

The AI-driven tools being employed by British Airways enable a more strategic approach to managing flight disruptions. For instance, these systems can assess whether a flight should be delayed or cancelled, optimising the experience for those affected. Other innovations include programmes that proactively reroute aircraft to steer clear of poor weather conditions and systems that strategically position planes based on passengers’ onward travel plans. This efficiency, however, comes against the backdrop of a complex operational structure and the inherent challenges of operating out of one of the world's busiest airports.

Despite these advancements, industry experts caution that the airline's true test lies ahead with the impending summer peak season, notorious for heightened travel demand. Aviation consultant John Strickland noted, “They had to turn it around. We know all airlines coming out of Covid had a hard time, but BA was really struggling.” The airline continues to contend with external factors that have influenced flight schedules, including broader issues within air traffic control and procurement challenges related to engines and spare parts from suppliers like Rolls-Royce.

British Airways’ parent company, International Airlines Group (IAG), has committed a staggering £7 billion to further modernise the airline. This sizeable investment is seen as an acknowledgment of the airline’s recent underperformance and its quest to elevate its standing within the aviation market. IAG’s chief executive, Luis Gallego, previously stated that British Airways “can do... much better,” reinforcing the notion that enhancing operational reliability and customer experience is paramount.

Part of this transformational effort involves migrating 700 of the airline's IT systems to cloud infrastructure, a project projected to span the next two years. Of the £7 billion investment, £750 million will be specifically directed towards updating IT capabilities, a move that aims to mitigate past issues of system outages and inefficiencies.

In recent years, British Airways has also been proactive in adopting next-generation technologies. As early as November 2019, the airline introduced an AI system designed to closely monitor turnaround processes, which has since become an integral part of its operational strategy. This initiative has underscored British Airways' ongoing commitment to leveraging technology in pursuit of enhanced punctuality and customer satisfaction.

While the achievements of British Airways in recent months are commendable, the path forward remains fraught with challenges. With the cumulative impact of the pandemic still resonating across the industry, and a peak travel season that has often overwhelmed even the most prepared airlines, British Airways will need to continue adapting and innovating to maintain its gains and fulfill stakeholders’ expectations. The airline’s investment in technology not only aims to rectify past grievances but also aspires to redefine the customer experience, thereby ensuring its competitive edge in a rapidly evolving market.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.ft.com/content/7ecef1a1-b0af-40bc-9b26-16bbdf91da98), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/7ecef1a1-b0af-40bc-9b26-16bbdf91da98)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.ft.com/content/7ecef1a1-b0af-40bc-9b26-16bbdf91da98), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/7ecef1a1-b0af-40bc-9b26-16bbdf91da98), [[4]](https://mediacentre.britishairways.com/news/18112019/flights-camera-action-british-airways-becomes-the-first-airline-in-the-world-to-use-next-generation-ai-and-video-technology-to-improve-punctuality-for-customers)
3. Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.ft.com/content/7ecef1a1-b0af-40bc-9b26-16bbdf91da98), [[5]](https://www.aviationfigures.com/how-british-airways-is-looking-to-cut-delays-with-staggering-7-billion-investment-in-ai/)
4. Paragraph 4: [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/7ecef1a1-b0af-40bc-9b26-16bbdf91da98)
5. Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.ft.com/content/7ecef1a1-b0af-40bc-9b26-16bbdf91da98), [[3]](https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/british-airways-to-move-700-systems-to-the-cloud/), [[6]](https://mediacentre.britishairways.com/pressrelease/details/19166)
6. Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.ft.com/content/7ecef1a1-b0af-40bc-9b26-16bbdf91da98), [[5]](https://www.aviationfigures.com/how-british-airways-is-looking-to-cut-delays-with-staggering-7-billion-investment-in-ai/)
7. Paragraph 7: [[7]](https://www.ft.com/content/bac81f2f-8f58-497b-87db-4e9c1fdd17f9)
8. Paragraph 8: [[3]](https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/british-airways-to-move-700-systems-to-the-cloud/)
9. Paragraph 9: [[4]](https://mediacentre.britishairways.com/news/18112019/flights-camera-action-british-airways-becomes-the-first-airline-in-the-world-to-use-next-generation-ai-and-video-technology-to-improve-punctuality-for-customers), [[5]](https://www.aviationfigures.com/how-british-airways-is-looking-to-cut-delays-with-staggering-7-billion-investment-in-ai/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ft.com/content/7ecef1a1-b0af-40bc-9b26-16bbdf91da98> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/7ecef1a1-b0af-40bc-9b26-16bbdf91da98> - British Airways has significantly improved its operational performance with the help of advanced AI technologies, according to CEO Sean Doyle. In the first quarter of 2025, 86% of BA flights from Heathrow departed on time—a record performance. The improvement follows a £100 million investment in operational resilience, including technological upgrades and the hiring of 600 additional staff at Heathrow. AI tools now assist in decision-making regarding flight disruptions, weather avoidance, and efficient aircraft parking based on passenger travel plans. These efforts come as BA strives to recover from years of operational challenges and pandemic-related setbacks, including previous IT system failures and delays related to parts and engine supply. Despite improvements, industry experts highlight the upcoming summer peak as a more stringent test. Parent company IAG has committed £7 billion to BA to enhance reliability and reposition the brand. The investment has been widely viewed as an acknowledgment of the airline’s recent underperformance.
3. <https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/british-airways-to-move-700-systems-to-the-cloud/> - British Airways is investing £7 billion in a modernization program that includes migrating 700 IT systems to the cloud. The program also involves deploying artificial intelligence (AI) and air-to-ground customer service. CEO Sean Doyle stated that the transformation will span over the next two years, aiming to improve customer experience. Of the planned investment, £750 million will be dedicated to IT infrastructure, including migrating 700 systems and thousands of servers to the cloud by early next year. The company has not publicly shared which cloud providers it will use. Over the past six years, BA has suffered several IT outages due to data center failures, including two in 2022.
4. <https://mediacentre.britishairways.com/news/18112019/flights-camera-action-british-airways-becomes-the-first-airline-in-the-world-to-use-next-generation-ai-and-video-technology-to-improve-punctuality-for-customers> - In November 2019, British Airways became the first airline to use next-generation AI and video technology to improve punctuality for customers. The airline employed intelligent software to monitor aircraft turnaround processes at Heathrow Terminal 5, capturing every moment from aircraft arrival to departure. The AI system compared live footage with the proposed schedule and sent alerts to managers if potential delays were detected, enabling prompt action to keep flights on track. This initiative was part of BA's £6.5 billion investment to enhance customer experience.
5. <https://www.aviationfigures.com/how-british-airways-is-looking-to-cut-delays-with-staggering-7-billion-investment-in-ai/> - British Airways is investing £7 billion in AI to cut delays, speed up baggage handling, and bookings. The airline's new 'Mission Control' center showcases cutting-edge technology making flying better. The carrier's biggest-ever outlay in its business is revolutionizing how it works, surpassing rivals with a data-led automated operation that allows passenger complaints to be resolved in real time.
6. <https://mediacentre.britishairways.com/pressrelease/details/19166> - British Airways unveiled a £7 billion transformation plan, including over 600 modernization initiatives. A new website, mobile app, free onboard messaging, new short-haul seats, and a new First suite are among the airline’s latest plans. Multi-million-pound leading-edge technology systems, AI, and machine learning will help flights depart on time, along with 350 new jobs at Heathrow and the first-ever bespoke Microsoft Connected Teams ground-to-air customer care solution.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/bac81f2f-8f58-497b-87db-4e9c1fdd17f9> - International Airlines Group (IAG), the parent company of British Airways, posted record profits of €3.5 billion in 2023, driven by high demand for leisure travel at premium prices. This performance surpassed its previous profit record set in 2019 at €3.3 billion. Despite a slower recovery in business travel, which returned to 70% of 2019 levels, the surge in tourist demand for premium seats helped offset this. British Airways, which contributed €1.4 billion, experienced operational challenges at Heathrow but improved its performance in early 2024. The airline is focusing on enhancing customer experience with investments in new business class seats, lounges, and IT systems.