UATP

Pay Their Way:

Why Split and Multi-Tender Payments Are Overdue in Airline Retailing

Industry insights from:

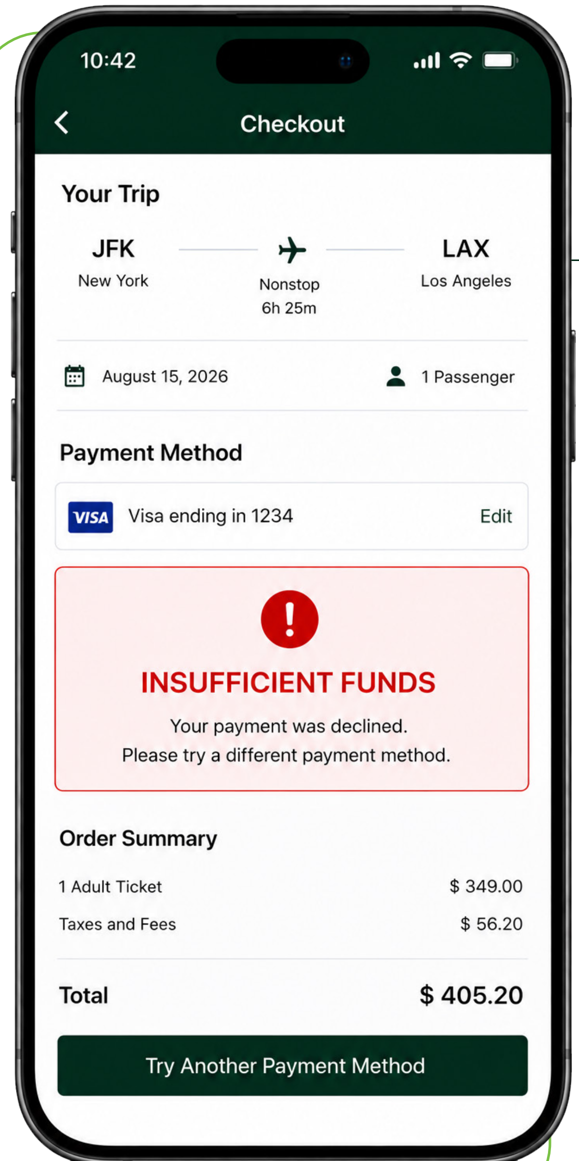
UATP

With contributions from:

Hands in

MICA

www.uatp.com



For many years, travelers have wanted to share the cost of a trip, **combine a card with loyalty points, or settle a single basket with multiple payment methods.**

But airlines and other travel merchants couldn't support those needs. Even traditional retailers have struggled with this challenge. Their technology stacks were built long ago, around a single payer and a single tender per transaction. Their settlement processes were built around single-card rails. And a long habit of treating payments as 'plumbing' rather than a commercial strategy has prevented many merchants, including global airlines, from delivering what their customers have been asking for all along.

The airline industry is particularly exposed. The shift to Offer-Order retailing, with its promise of higher basket values and more complex itineraries, adds urgency to the need for flexible payment options. But the real impetus is passenger demand. Split and multi-tender payments address a gap that long predates Modern Airline Retailing (MAR) and persists across every channel through which an airline sells.

What is changing is the industry's ability to respond. The current state of air and travel payments, together with long-standing consumer demand for greater payment flexibility, makes a strong commercial case for split and multi-tender capabilities. Two companies, Hands In and Mica, are demonstrating how each capability can operate within existing airline and travel merchant systems (and in other sectors) and deliver significant basket-value decline reduction and conversion lift across the funnel.

Split and multi-tender payments also create room for ancillary bundles to grow beyond single-card limits, encourage deeper loyalty engagement through points-plus-cash, and build stronger direct-channel competitiveness against OTAs. They also create more flexibility for corporate and mixed-purpose travel, and introduce credential-less security that widens payment choices for customers without increasing fraud exposure.

Across industries, the integration path matters as much as the features themselves. More capabilities without clean, efficient reconciliation create back-office costs that erode any front-end gains. Standalone vendors add development and management time, PCI scope, and operational overhead to programs already stretching internal capacity.

Activating split and multi-tender payments through a proven platform like UATP's Ceptor® gives airlines and travel merchants both capabilities without rebuilding their payment architecture or disturbing existing acquiring, gateway, or settlement relationships... or any other part of their business.

This whitepaper explores the dynamics of split and multi-tender payments with a focus on commercial aviation and the wider travel industry, and, in the process, offers travel merchants a pathway to incorporate these vital capabilities into their payment and commercial strategies.

The Payment Flexibility Gap

Split and multi-tender payments are overdue capabilities, but not emerging ones. The options consumers want at checkout, like splitting a basket across payers, mixing points with cash, and combining a card with a digital wallet, sit at the very heart of their experience with any commercial brand.

Payment flexibility increasingly serves as an affordability mechanism for high-value purchases across industries and group commerce. From sports teams purchasing merchandise to premium retailers selling high-ticket items and event companies coordinating group experiences, split payments are emerging wherever multiple people share the cost of a purchase or a single payment method no longer reflects how individuals and groups want to pay.

Airlines and other travel merchants, including hotels and OTAs, want to meet that demand, but often struggle to do so.

The barriers, as with many challenges related to travel payments, are the technology stacks, settlement processes, booking procedures, and prioritization decisions that have accumulated over decades, making even modest updates a daunting prospect. For airlines, the shift to Modern Airline Retailing raises the pressure to modernize, but the gap predates it by years.

On the positive side, supporting split and multi-tender payments no longer requires rebuilding the payment architecture beneath the booking flow; with the right partners and the right approach, airlines and other travel merchants can chart a direct, quick-to-market pathway to meet the demand their customers clearly want.

The State of Airline Payments and the Demand Airlines Have Left Unmet

That demand has been visible for years, reflected in both travelers' usage and their stated desires for more convenient payment experiences. Worldpay's 11th Global Payments Report found that digital wallets accounted for 56% of global e-commerce value in 2025, against cards at 30%.

Convenience is the top reason travelers choose a payment method: 74% of US consumers and 71% of European consumers cite easier, faster checkout as a primary reason for using digital payment methods, per McKinsey's 2024 Digital Payments Consumer Survey. A checkout experience that forces a single payer to pay with a single card, i.e., the typical travel booking process, stands in stark contrast to the ease of purchase in most other categories travelers buy from.

What's holding airlines back from creating the payment experiences that many e-commerce merchants have already mastered?

The first constraint is obviously technology. Passenger Service Systems and other traditional retailing platforms were built around one form of payment per transaction, with no native concept of splitting a basket across payers or tenders.

The second is the process. Settlement, reconciliation, and refund logic all assume a single instrument, so any attempt to split a transaction creates back-office exceptions that erase the commercial gain.

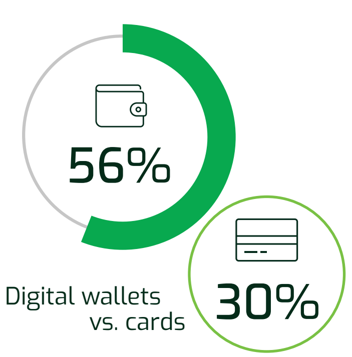
The third is prioritization. McKinsey identifies a further $14 billion in airline value tied to payments, on top of the $45 billion retailing prize, much of it unrealized because carriers treat payment as a cost center rather than a revenue lever.

The three constraints have continually reinforced each other. Technology limitations have made it harder to justify the process change, while process complexity makes the technology investment look riskier. This combination has kept payments low on the modernization priority list while airlines focused their investment on inventory systems, revenue management, and, more recently, on implementing MAR, Offer & Order, and New Distribution Capability (NDC) protocols. Payment teams have operated under tight cost mandates that reward transaction-processing efficiency rather than commercial innovation.

The transition to Offer & Order and MAR will, ironically, make payment-related constraints even more expensive. McKinsey puts the full retailing opportunity at $45 billion by 2030.

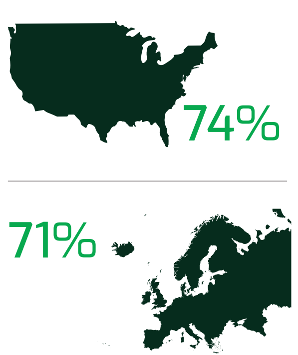
At a Glance:

Digital wallets dominated global e-commerce in 2025



Digital wallets vs. cards

Consumers prefer digital payments for faster, easier checkout



Most travel bookings still require a single payer using a single payment method.

Travel checkout lags behind consumer payment expectations.

Compounding Effects

Technology

Legacy payment technology made modernization efforts appear costly, complex, and high risk.

Process

Complex and deeply embedded payment processes made change difficult to justify and implement.

Prioritization

Payment modernization was consistently deprioritized in favor of competing priorities.

Bundling flights, ancillaries, and partner services drives basket values higher, and larger baskets reach card limits sooner. Combine the larger transaction sizes with the fact that global ancillary revenue reached $148.4 billion in 2024, and the total missed revenue impact of declined or deferred bookings balloons significantly.

Single-instrument checkout could be the most visible source of declines and abandonment: Insufficient funds drive 44% of soft declines.

Online card-not-present declines run near 15% against 4% for card-present, and more than half of would-be buyers abandon after repeated failed attempts. Every one of those abandoned baskets is a traveler who was willing to spend.

Meanwhile, every other consumer category, from e-commerce marketplaces to ride-hailing apps to grocery checkout, has learned to handle multiple payers and multiple tenders without asking the customer to try again.

Conversion, Revenue, and Improved Traveler Experience: Benefits of Split and Multi-Tender Payments

Just because they're late to the game doesn't mean airlines have no recourse. In fact, several airlines are partnering with companies like Hands In to allow several payers, cards, or methods to settle a single booking.

And with their new partnership with UATP and the embedding of split-payment capability into the Ceptor platform, even more airlines will be able to combine multiple cards, payers, and payment methods into a single transaction. The conversion advantage can be huge: Hands In reports a 95% completion rate for split-tender transactions once the initial authentication succeeds.

Group payments cover use cases that airline checkout has never cleanly accommodated. Families, friends, tour groups, and corporate-leisure parties share the cost of a single order across multiple cards and accounts; all reconciled into a single booking record.

95%

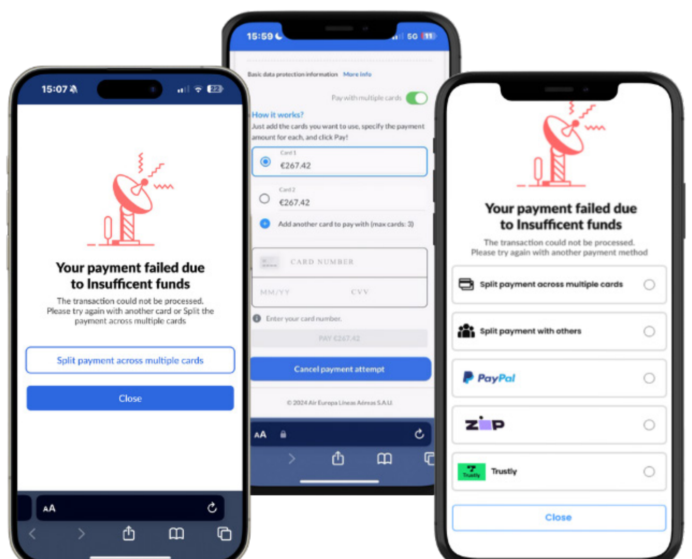
Completion rate for Hands In split-tender transactions after initial authentication

Shared cost on a single booking targets transactions that would otherwise be lost to insufficient funds or card limits, while opening the door to larger purchases that bundle more ancillaries and partner services.

This is particularly useful in markets where authorization rates and transaction limits are comparatively low. Consider Air Europa, a Hands In partner, which operates a significant number of transatlantic routes to Latin America and processes approximately 2% to 4% of its total payment volume in its direct channel through Hands In.

The ability for travelers to split the cost of an Air Europa booking among multiple payers leads to higher conversions for the airline and broader access to the LatAm market. Air Europa's success, coupled with a recent partnership between Hands In and a Tier 1 airline in the Middle East, is one of the reasons Hands In expects its transaction volume to increase 300% over 2026.

The experience for travelers matters as much as volume, conversion, and revenue impact for airlines and travel merchants. Travelers split their payment at checkout within the airline's own environment, with the carrier retaining control of the customer interface, brand, and conversion path. That means a corporate traveler can pay for upgrades separately from the core fare, or a Gen Z traveler can use a credit card plus BNPL to cover a particularly expensive flight, without disrupting the booking flow. On the back end, when embedded in Ceptor, Hands In handles enablement and reconciliation together, so the flexibility offered at the front end doesn't generate extra work after the transaction.



BY THE NUMBERS:

The average transaction value that Hands In processes today ranges from $1,200 to $1,600, but that rises to $2,000 to $2,500 for group payments. With a new OTA Deployment in Australia and the implementation of a BNPL use case on the horizon, Hands In expects its average transaction to value to grow even further.

Hands in & AirEuropa

Hands In and Air Europa: How Split Payments Drive Materially Higher Basket Values

The partnership between Hands In and Air Europa illustrates the impact of supporting split payments. Air Europa reports that **bookings completed with multi-card payments are roughly five times the carrier's average transaction value, and group-payment bookings are around eight times higher.** Both these figures represent significant topline growth potential for the airline.

The pattern suggests that payment flexibility encourages travelers to confirm itineraries and ancillary bundles they would otherwise defer, abandon, or split across separate transactions that the airline never sees as a single Order. The conclusion is evident: when the basket size that an airline can accept rises, so does the basket size travelers are willing to build. Split payments turn soft declines at checkout from a constraint into a sales lever.

Flexibility, Fraud Control, and Transaction Costs: Bottom-Line Advantages

While split payments enable multiple payers to collaborate on a transaction, multi-tender payments allow a traveler to pay for a single basket using more than one type of instrument in a single checkout. UATP has partnered with the pioneer in multi-tender payments, Mica, to enable these transactions for travel merchants. Mica's solutions allow merchants to allocate a single booking across multiple payment types in one transaction while keeping settlement and reconciliation streamlined. The UATP-Mica partnership brings this capability into Ceptor for online, in-app, in-store, in-airport, and in-flight purchases, extending this capability to the traveler beyond the booking flow.

Extending multi-tender payments beyond checkout. Available through Ceptor across online, in-app, in-store, in-airport, and in-flight purchases.

MICA + CEPTOR

Airlines continue to reconcile each transaction through a unique UATP token in Ceptor, while Mica's credential-less tokenization operates behind the scenes to secure the payment process.

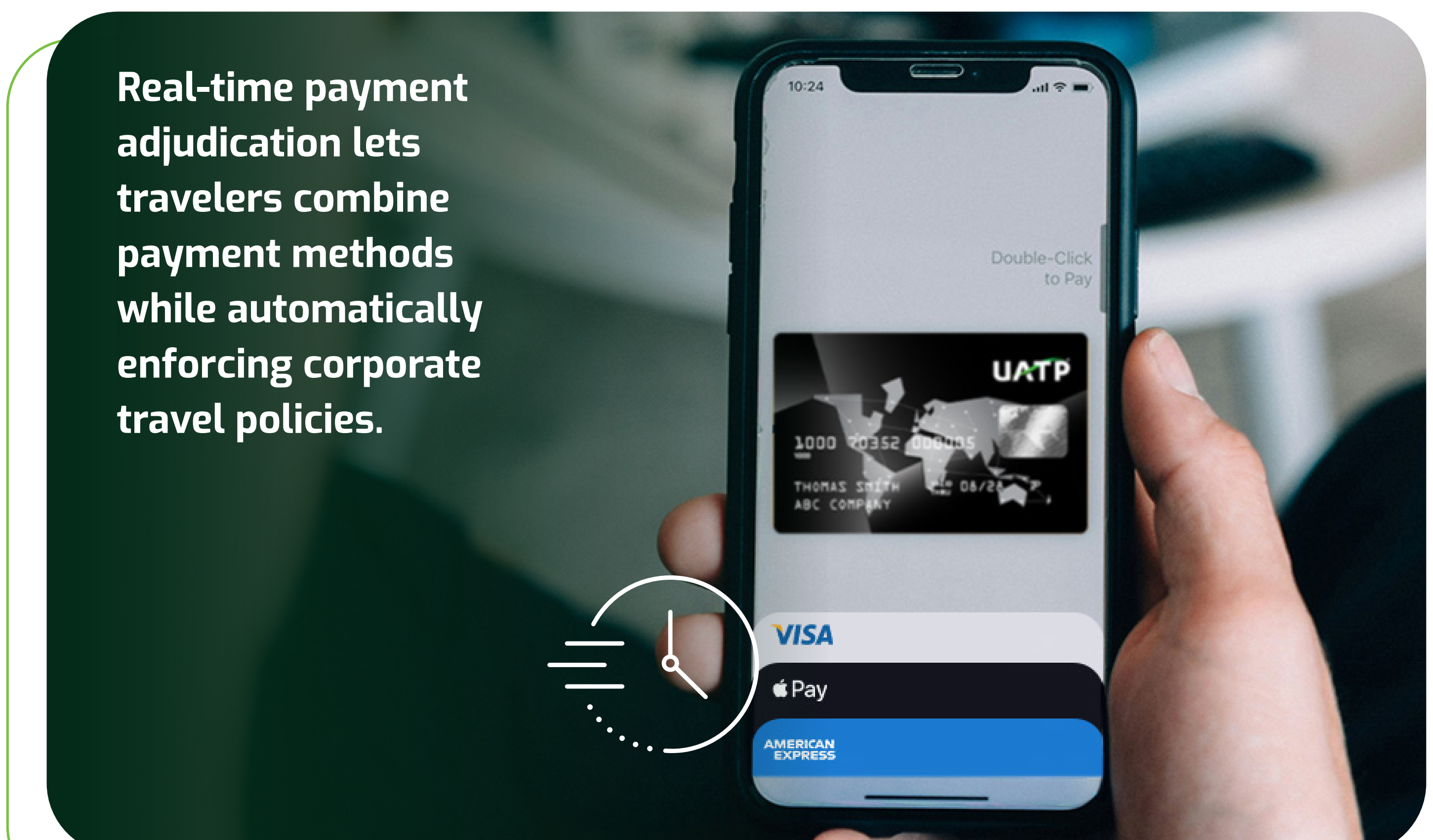
The capability rests on an adjudication engine that, in real time, decides which tender type pays for a given item in a transaction, against rules the merchant sets. Think of a typical grocery check-out process as an illustrative example. An adjudication engine recognizes clipped digital coupons, manufacturer surprise-and-delight rebates, and loyalty-account dollars while the items are still moving down the belt, applying each one to the items it covers before the consumer's debit account receives an authorization request.

The consumer realizes greater spending power by paying less from their debit account, while the merchant can access attribution data to see which promotion drove the conversion.

Mica's patented item-level adjudication engine was originally built to handle U.S. government nutrition benefits, where a single SNAP or WIC transaction must honor item-level eligibility, state-level allowances, and rolling monthly limits that may have been partially drawn down at a different merchant the week before. If a system can handle WIC adjudication, every other multi-tender use case is relatively simple in comparison.

Airlines and travel merchants need that same engineering in the booking flow.

A corporate traveler under a $400 domestic travel policy restriction can pay for the flight with their corporate card up to that limit, then use their personal card or stored loyalty value to cover the upgrade to a premium cabin. Duty-of-care rules, fare class restrictions, and per-trip caps are all accommodated by the Mica adjudication engine. Adjudication runs once, in line with the transaction, rather than falling out into post-booking exception work that finance and travel managers must reconcile later.



Flexibility matters as much as the rules behind it. Payment methods that did not exist five years ago are now indispensable daily tools for many travelers. Stablecoins, instant account-to-account rails, regional digital wallets, and BNPL providers each emerged to meet a different need on a different timeline. An airline that must integrate every new tender directly into its checkout will always be one cycle behind traveler demand. A multi-tender platform with a toggle-on mechanism for new methods compresses time-to-acceptance from quarters to days.

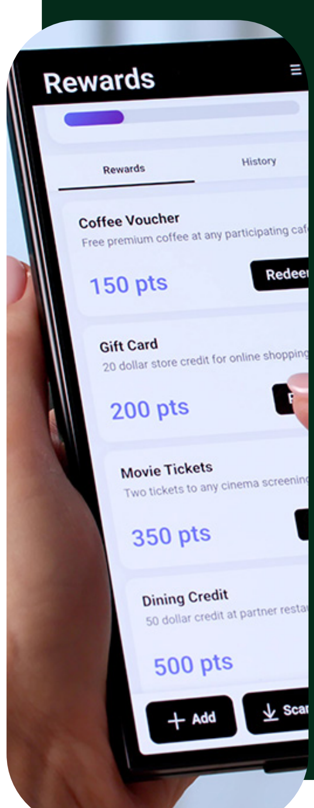
Transaction cost control is another key advantage of supporting multi-tender payments. Traditional cards, with their notoriously high interchange fees, are rarely the most cost-effective option for merchants, even if they're often the most familiar to customers.

With Mica, merchants can combine cards, account-to-account payments, vouchers, coupons, loyalty currencies, and other stored-value instruments into a single transaction, improving booking allocation and simplifying back-office operations.

Account-to-account payments, stored value, and loyalty currencies clear at a fraction of the cost. The more often basket balances can be routed through the lowest-cost path the customer is willing to accept, the more margin a merchant can capture. On a high-frequency, high-volume product like air travel, basis-point savings on the payment mix compound quickly into a material bottom-line impact.

Mica's patented credential-less tokenization also addresses the fraud question that airlines and travel merchants are constantly grappling with, and the fear that expanding their tender options at checkout could exacerbate it. Mica's approach generates single-use keys that cannot be intercepted or reused, removing stored credentials as the high-value target attackers go after. Adding more tender types no longer means storing more sensitive data, and the PCI scope no longer expands with every new method the airline accepts. The perceived trade-off between payment flexibility and fraud protection is eliminated, and the multi-tender convenience travelers clamor for becomes the most efficient payment approach for airlines and travel merchants.

Addressing Loyalty Liability with Multi-Tender Payments



Loyalty programs are significant assets for consumer brands, especially airlines. But they are also liabilities, as points or miles balances are treated as deferred revenue on the balance sheet until members redeem. They aren't small liabilities, either; American Airlines' AAdvantage program reported more than $7 billion in loyalty-related deferred revenue in its most recent 10-K, with United and Delta carrying comparable balances.

Multi-tender payments create new opportunities to draw down those balances. Loyalty members below full-award thresholds can settle a booking with points plus a card or wallet, converting balances that would otherwise sit unredeemed into recognized revenue. Every points-plus-cash transaction moves dollars from liability to income, meaning that the flexibility that helps the traveler helps the balance sheet. And that's an advantage every airline and travel merchant can appreciate.

The Commercial Case for Air as well as Travel, Retail and Hospitality

As the Hands In and Mica examples show, the ability to accept split and multi-tender payments is real and proven. But why should airlines and other merchants pursue and prioritize these capabilities?

Decline reduction is the first and most important reason. With travel declines at the high end of the 15% online range, split and multi-tender give travelers a route forward when one payment method falls short, rather than a dead end at checkout. Consider the basket sizes that Offer-Order now produces. A family of four buying a premium-economy bundle with checked bags, seat selection, lounge access, and ground transfer can easily exceed $6,000 in a single transaction. Asking one debit card to absorb that amount runs into bank-imposed daily limits before fraud rules go into effect. Split the same basket across two cards or settle the airfare on a corporate account and the ancillaries on a personal account, and the transaction completes on the first attempt.

The result of decline reduction is conversion lift. The ability to accept split and multi-tender payments raises approval rates, increases ancillary revenue, and improves customer satisfaction. With more than half of buyers abandoning after repeated failed attempts, recovering even a fraction of those carts flows straight to the bottom line. This has an exponential impact, since the carts most likely to fail are the highest-value bundles that airlines worked the hardest to build.

Bigger baskets become viable. Removing the single-card ceiling gives ancillary attachment rates and third-party add-ons room to grow, feeding the $148.4 billion ancillary pool that already exists. As Hands In's experience with Air Europa shows, multi-tender transactions can yield 5x higher average transaction values. Loyalty engagement deepens. Take a member with 45,000 points trying to redeem against a 60,000-point award. Under the all-or-nothing model, that booking does not happen. Points-plus-cash settles the difference at checkout, turning a deferred award into a confirmed booking and increasing active program participation and the perceived value of accruals.

Direct-channel competitiveness against third-party bookers strengthens. When an airline can't accept a group split, the OTA, travel agent, or TMC simply builds workflows around the carrier's inflexibility, often charging fees to manage what the airline could have processed natively. Each redirected booking is data, margin, and the customer relationship, leaving the airline's reach. Shared travel volume that today flows through aggregators or manual reimbursement stays inside the airline's branded checkout, where the carrier keeps the data, the attach, and the next interaction.

Fraud protection improves alongside flexibility. Mica's unique approach, for example, lets airlines broaden payment options without widening fraud exposure or expanding PCI scope, critical capabilities at a time when U.S. card fraud represents 42% of the global total.

The prize for getting split and multi-tender payments right is a big one. McKinsey's $14 billion payments opportunity identifies conversion, reach, and ancillary growth as the core levers, all of which are addressed simultaneously through split and multi-tender payments, making these capabilities a top priority for airlines and travel merchants.

Why the Integration Path Matters

If these capabilities are the top priority for a business, then how to integrate them with existing systems and processes should be the top consideration as well.

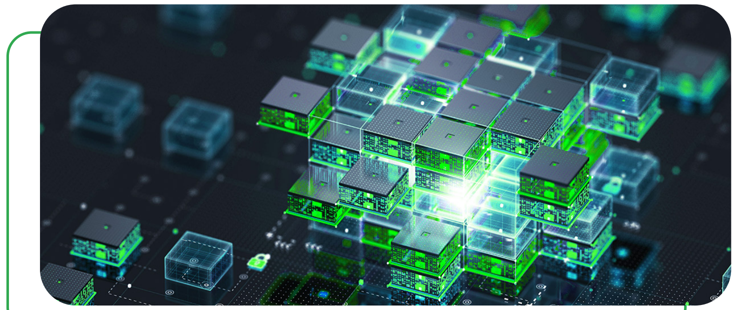
Reconciliation, for example, is perhaps the single greatest challenge in implementing split and multi-tender capabilities and is likely to create the highest back-office costs. Multiple payers, tenders, and currencies on a single Order must settle cleanly, or the revenue saved at the front end gets spent resolving exceptions at the back. Finance teams that have spent a decade rationalizing the reconciliation process will not welcome a payment innovation that reintroduces exception work at scale.

Standalone vendors add integration burden. Mid-sized carriers already face Offer-Order transitions costing $50 million to $100 million. Separate split and multi-tender vendors add development time, PCI scope, and ongoing operational overhead on top of programs that are already stretching internal capacity. Every new vendor means a new integration to maintain, a new contract to negotiate, and a new potential failure point to monitor.

Network-level delivery preserves existing relationships. Working with UATP, Hands In, and Mica lets airlines and travel merchants modernize without disrupting existing acquiring, gateway, or settlement relationships. UATP's Ceptor platform already handles authorization, routing, AFP connectivity, and simple unique-token reconciliation at airline scale. Hands In adds split payments, and Mica adds multi-tender, both of which are activated without requiring any internal development for the functionality itself.

UATP's position in the ecosystem matters here. Running the rails means more than processing transactions. It means handling the settlement chain across multiple currencies, the AFP integrations that vary by market, the chargeback and refund logic that determines when revenue lands, and the compliance posture that satisfies card schemes and regional regulators.

UATP handles this for airlines and travel merchants today.



The Hands In and Mica integrations build on top of the existing flows rather than running in parallel, which is why activation timelines are measured in months rather than years. The capabilities arrive where the rails are already running.

Closing the Capability Gap

The demand for split and multi-tender payment has sat in plain sight for years. Now, the technical and process barriers that kept airlines from meeting that demand are beginning to lift.

The transition to Offer-Order makes the commercial case for more convenient, authorization-friendly payment approaches clearer. Travelers want to pay in their own way, and the carriers that let them will capture conversion, ancillary revenue, and loyalty engagement that their competitors continue to forfeit.

The open question is whether to build, buy, or activate through a partner with proven payment bona fides. Building means absorbing development time and PCI scope that few airlines have spare capacity for. Buying standalone means integrating multiple vendors and shouldering reconciliation complexity that erodes the front-end gain.

Through the Ceptor platform, the Hands In partnership for split payments, and the Mica partnership for multi-tender, UATP gives airlines both capabilities without the integration burden that has kept them out of reach.

Your passengers, guests, and travelers want to split payments and use different payment methods.

Learn how your company can meet that demand with UATP. Contact one of our experts today.

The UATP Advantage

As the world's most secure closed-loop network, UATP combines a proven reputation with extensive industry expertise to design, create, and implement high-performance payment solutions at a competitive cost, without sacrificing quality of service.

To learn how UATP can help improve your payments strategy, visit www.uatp.com.

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