



STRATEGIC AVIATION SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP
of the Local Government Association

ITEM 7: TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO THE USE OF AIRSPACE - SASIG EVIDENCE SUBMISSION

Summary

This report provides background to the Transport Select Committee's (TSC) 'Inquiry into the Use of Airspace', along with the questions posed by the Committee (**Annex A**, pg.3) and SASIG's evidence (**Annex B**, pg.4).

SASIG's main recommendations to the Committee are set out below. The response submitted by SASIG to the TSC on 6 October 2008 (**Annex B**, pg.4) is now the property of the Committee and is confidential until published by the Committee.

SASIG's Key Recommendations

- **Early assessment of airspace requirements**
Aviation proposals resulting in increased capacity must be supported by assessment of the airspace requirements.
- **Production of an Airspace Master Plan for the UK**
An Airspace Master Plan for the UK should be drawn up using robust, independent evidence, and integrated fully into a review of the 2003 Aviation White Paper. This Airspace Master Plan should also inform the production of a National Policy Statement for aviation.
- **Greater understanding and consideration of community impacts of aviation**
Increasingly congested airspace should, where necessary, lead to capacity constraints for reasons of safety and environmental protection.

Recommendation

That the SASIG evidence be noted.

IntroductionThe House of Commons Transport Select Committee conducted an inquiry into the use of airspace, calling for evidence to be submitted by interested parties by 6 October 2008. The inquiry examined the progress made to date in preparing for the necessary changes to the management of airspace.

Background

- 2 The Transport Select Committee provided the following details (par. 3-5 below) as background to this inquiry.
- 3 According to Government projections, the number of passengers passing through UK airports will grow from 228 million in 2005 to 490 million in 2030 if demand is unconstrained by airport capacity. The 2003 White Paper, 'The Future of Air Transport', sets out measures to make better use of existing infrastructure and proposes a number of schemes to increase capacity, provided certain environmental conditions can be met. The changes outlined in the White Paper Progress Report published in 2006 make provision for UK airports to accommodate some 465 million passengers per annum by 2030.

- 4 UK airspace, particularly in South East England, is some of the most congested in the world and is nearing capacity. If rising demand for air travel is to be met through additional airport capacity as the White Paper suggests, corresponding increases in airspace capacity are required. The Government says the White Paper "recognised the need for a structured programme for the redesign of UK airspace that would help protect safety standards, relieve current constraints, take account of environmental impacts and accommodate the forecast increase in air transport movements where additional capacity was supported".
- 5 The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is responsible for the planning and regulation of UK airspace. It published new Airspace Change Process Guidance in March 2007. NATS (formerly National Air Traffic Control Services) provides air traffic control services at 15 UK airports and 'en-route' air traffic services for aircraft flying through UK airspace. NATS must be capable of meeting any reasonable level of overall demand. NATS is due to implement new airspace designs for existing traffic in the South East in 2009.

Conclusion

- 6 A series of questions for consultees to consider is enclosed at Appendix A, whilst the full text of the evidence submitted by SASIG is at Appendix B, which is confidential until published by the Committee

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Questions posed by Transport Select Committee for their Inquiry into the Use of Airspace

- 1 What changes to the management of airspace could be required as a result of the additional airport capacity outlined in the 2003 White Paper?
Are the White Paper's projections for increased passenger demand still accurate?
Are all the measures to provide for increased passenger demand likely to be implemented?
- 2 Can safety be maintained as airspace is increasingly utilised? Is there a suitable interface between military and civilian arrangements for air traffic control?
- 3 Is the current approach to planning and regulating the use of UK airspace adequate? Would an Airspace Master Plan covering the period of the White Paper be beneficial? Could a piecemeal approach to individual developments necessitate additional redesigns subsequently?
- 4 How are the effects and aircraft noise and emissions taken into account when changes are made to the use of airspace? Who should be consulted about such changes? How should the balance between conflicting interests be struck?
- 5 How does the management of airspace in the rest of Europe affect flights into the UK? Is there an opportunity to integrate our plans for changes to airspace management more effectively with those of other European countries?
- 6 What opportunities are there to apply new techniques and technologies to reduce wasteful flying on indirect routes and excessive 'stacking' while planes wait to land? How can the potential of any such opportunities best be realised? Could environmental benefits be gained as a result of such improvements?
- 7 In relation to the redesign of UK airspace, is the allocation of the roles and responsibilities of each of the interested parties—Department for Transport, the CAA, airport operators, NATS, etc—appropriate and clearly understood? Are the structures of the parties appropriate for undertaking the roles that they should play?
- 8 Do airspace management considerations delay the planning processes in relation to airport development proposals? How will airspace management considerations be taken into account by the proposed new Infrastructure Planning Commission and the relevant National Policy Statements on airport planning?
- 9 What could be the implications for smaller airfields, recreational flying and helicopters of changes to airspace management to enable safe and efficient increases in capacity at the UK's major airports? How should an appropriate balance between conflicting priorities be determined?
- 10 Will it be possible to recruit and train staff in order that airspace changes can be implemented in parallel with additional airport capacity?
- 11 Who should fund airspace changes? Is there likely to be enough funding to undertake the redesign required to bring about the necessary additional airspace capacity?

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TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO THE USE OF AIRSPACE

Introduction

The Strategic Aviation Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association (LGA) with a membership of 54 Local Authorities representing 14 million people, or approximately a quarter of the UK population.

SASIG seeks to ensure that any national aviation strategy for the UK is implemented through regional planning guidance and other planning processes so as to reconcile economic, social and environmental issues in a sustainable way.

SASIG's Key Recommendations

- **Early assessment of airspace requirements**
Aviation proposals resulting in increased capacity must be supported by assessment of the airspace requirements.
- **Production of an Airspace Master Plan for the UK**
An Airspace Master Plan for the UK should be drawn up using robust, independent evidence, and integrated fully into a review of the 2003 Aviation White Paper. This Airspace Master Plan should also inform the production of a National Policy Statement for aviation.
- **Greater understanding and consideration of community impacts of aviation**
Increasingly congested airspace should, where necessary, lead to capacity constraints for reasons of safety and environmental protection.

Responses

1. The additional airport capacity outlined in the 2003 Air Transport White Paper (ATWP) necessitates consideration of airspace for the associated increase in air transport movements. These considerations were not made in preparation for the White Paper, and to date the airspace requirements for the ATWP proposals have still not been assessed.

Earlier this year, NATS consulted on proposals for airspace changes associated with Stansted, Luton and London City airports – the Terminal Control North (TCN) airspace block. Despite this being one of the largest airspace change proposals undertaken for the UK, it did not address the ATWP proposals for the airports within TCN.

The shortcomings of the TCN airspace change proposal, in terms of longevity, consideration of future development on the ground, consultation support and public engagement, and overall environmental gains, must be addressed in subsequent airspace consultations.

Further research and consideration of the viability and impacts of rural routing being used in preference to flying over urban areas is required. This may require revisions to current strategic guidance.

The growth projections outlined in the 2003 ATWP may or may not be met. Revised forecasts are required to future-proof the ATWP proposals - a Progress Report is not sufficient; a full review of the proposals is required to provide for long-term, robust, strategic planning, in place of the piecemeal, incremental proposals in the ATWP. Reassessment of oil prices and the increasingly unpredictable marketplace are required to ensure that the capacity that is provided is actually used. This would reduce pressure on airspace operators to provide capacity beyond safe and environmentally sustainable levels.

EU-wide airspace blocks could provide for an increase in capacity, as could estuary airport solutions, and over-seas stacking. These elements should all be assessed in terms of airspace management considerations.

2. Safe operations must be maintained at all times. As routes become increasingly congested, safety requirements must not be compromised and penalties for level-busts must be severe. This should be taken into consideration when deciding on the location of new capacity. Amongst other issues, capacity increases may affect the size and location of local Public Safety Zones, and thus land-use planning decisions.

The operational interface between military and civilian arrangements for air traffic control must provide for the most efficient use of airspace, taking account of safety, environmental, social and economic considerations.

3. The planning and regulation of UK airspace requires long-term strategic support. This means that an Airspace Master Plan, based on comprehensive and independent evidence, covering at least the period of the Aviation White Paper but ideally to 2050 and possibly beyond, is needed. Without this, it remains difficult to determine whether or not the White Paper projections can be safely met. The Airspace Master Plan should be used to inform the production of a National Policy Statement for aviation, and should address, for instance, the following elements: maps of airspace blocks across the UK in association with airfields; the current air quality and noise emission conditions in each block; the relevant limits to not be breached for air quality and noise conditions in each block; the measures needing to be implemented to manage and reduce noise and air quality in each block; and following consideration of the aforementioned prerequisite elements, the current and potential capacity per block in terms of air transport movements by type.

To date, airspace has been considered on a piecemeal, incremental basis, and a national overview is very overdue. A UK Airspace Master Plan should be used to inform the airspace considerations that should be provided in support of development proposals.

4. The effects of aircraft noise and emissions on local populations are not given equal footing with capacity considerations. There should be accepted thresholds for environmental impacts which, if exceeded, would invalidate Airspace Change Proposals. More hard evidence should be gathered to ensure that environmental impacts are considered on a par with economic and safety statistics. Local Authorities should provide input to the collection of that evidence, and be key consultees for Airspace Change Proposals.
5. Better integration with EU airspace is necessary if coastal stacking is to be an option. A single integrated EU airspace block would increase efficiency by allowing controllers to better regulate the speed of traffic arriving in UK airspace.

6. The environmental gains to be achieved from the Terminal Control North airspace change are minimal, and in contrast to the environmental impacts of the growth envisaged, particularly in already congested airspace. Greater emphasis should be placed on maintaining environmental standards, which should not be considered as subsidiary to capacity constraint considerations. It is disappointing that the increasing use of Controlled Descent Approaches (CDA), Precision Area Navigation systems (PR-Nav), and other technological advances, have not led to more significant environmental gains. Further assessment of these technologies is required to fully understand the extent and impacts of their use, particularly in terms of the community impact of aircraft noise.
7. Provision of expert advice and data needs to be made earlier in the consideration of development proposals. Currently, NATS is the main airspace control provider, and as such should be required to provide data to inform airspace considerations in relation to development proposals. NATS' advice regarding capacity limitation should take precedence over externally set growth targets.

In order for the CAA to strengthen its reviewing process of actual operations, it must be appropriately resourced, to enforce adherence to their CAP 725 Airspace Change Process Guidance.

8. Under current arrangements, airspace management is given no consideration in airport development proposals. In order to make informed, robust decisions on such proposals, it is necessary for airspace management considerations to be provided prior to decisions regarding consent or refusal being made. The issue is not one of delay, more a matter of having the necessary information available at the correct point in the process.

The Aviation National Policy Statement should contain a fully comprehensive UK Airspace Master Plan.

The proposed new Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) is intended to consider only those projects defined as Major Infrastructure Projects (MIPs). There will be a need for coordination between the IPC, airspace control provider(s), the CAA, Local Authorities, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), and the Department for Transport (DfT).

9. Allocation of a greater proportion of airspace to commercial operations will reduce to some extent the airspace available for smaller airfields, recreational flying and helicopters. This could in turn lead to a lack of training opportunities and a subsequent skills and employment shortfall. It is essential that public consultation adequately captures the community impact of overflying, an area that still requires further research and consideration. Assessment and monitoring of the impact of new routes and altitudes is essential in order to inform an appropriate balance between such conflicting priorities.
10. It should be possible to resolve personnel issues such that airspace changes can be implemented in parallel with additional airport capacity.
11. Those who benefit from additional airspace capacity should fund changes. If carriers want greater capacity, they should invest in safe routes - the same applies to airports looking to attract more carriers. Central Government backing should be made available to ensure safety standards are maintained.