THE VOICE OF UK AIRPORTS

Draft Airspace Modernisation Strategy 2022–2040 Consultation

April 2022

Introduction

This response is submitted on behalf of the AOA, the trade association representing the interests of airports across the UK. The AOA represents over 40 airports and is the principal body engaging with the UK Government, Parliamentarians, and regulatory authorities on airport matters.

The AOA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the latest CAA Consultation on Draft Airspace Modernisation Strategy 2022-2040. The AOA have gone through the consultation questions but will address the areas outlined in the questionnaire as we cannot with the many airports we represent, carry out the tick box exercise as you have requested. AOA will offer feedback from members as this conveys the substantial viewpoints they share on this topic.

Background

Airports are the engines of growth and a facilitator of social and economic activity. In a normal year, our airports enable almost 300 million passenger movements: British people going on highly valued holidays, foreign tourists coming to the UK, people connecting across the UK, and business travel supporting the UK's place in the global economy. We are also vital for freight – 40% of the UK's non-EU trade by value travels by air. In a normal year aviation contributes more than £92bn to the economy each year, supports a million jobs and provides more than £8 billion in tax revenues to the Exchequer.

However, this once booming sector has suffered its worst crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Between April and December 2020, passenger numbers were down nearly 90% year-on-year. We estimate our industry has lost £10bn of revenue over the course of the Covid period. Traffic levels have still not recovered to pre-pandemic levels and may not do so for several years. The combination of lost routes, lower than normal passenger levels and debt taken on to survive Covid means that aviation is an industry that should currently be supported and not have extra burdens placed on it at this time.

The stated intention of the Government is to establish the United Kingdom as a 'Global Britain' trading with the world. In the post-Brexit environment, the quality of our aviation connectivity will become even more important to making Britain an attractive and competitive place to invest and do business

This why it is more important than ever to make sure that Airspace Modernisation (AM) continues. Airspace is a key part of the UK's national infrastructure and there is an urgent need to modernise airspace across the whole of the UK to handle the forecast levels of traffic without significant delays. Modernised airspace will enable us to further improve continuous climbs and descents, reduce holding, and implement multiple routes which can help minimise noise and meet environmental targets.

The UK aviation industry continues to commit substantial resources to facilitate the modernisation of UK airspace. However, it cannot do it alone and Government has a crucial role to play in the process.

The Government must work in partnership with industry to provide a clear policy framework to deliver change allowing industry to make changes to airspace to the benefit of passengers, the economy and local communities, while also ensuring that difficult decisions that affect certain communities can be taken based on robust evidence, a clear process and according to local circumstances.

Principle Consideration for the Draft Airspace Modernisation Strategy 2022-2024

Overall approach of the Draft Strategy

Members welcome the refreshed Airspace Modernisation Strategy and extending the strategy to 2040 as this allows airports and operators to plan for the future, and the development of airspace. However, we want to highlight the following areas for consideration and questions that should be considered:

a) Modernisation needs to take place in a coherent and consistent way so that the benefits set out in the shared strategic vision and objectives are delivered as stated.
b) The consultation should consider how it will work in areas affected by multiple airports, and how conflicts will be resolved between airports.
c) To ensure any system for managing cooperative deconfliction is thoroughly consulted on in regard to remotely piloted or unpiloted aircraft.
d) In the objectives on pg 5, members wish to know whether Business Aviation is being captured?
e) There is concern whether the CAA have the resource capability to cope with the ACP as we get to stage 3. This lack of clarity also has implications for planning (e.g. allocation of resource, timelines etc.), which is difficult for a sponsor.
f) It is important to have a balanced approach where the needs of new entrants are not at the detriment of existing airspace users.
g) We should be cautious about the goal of simplification. Whilst Simplification can sometimes drive or deliver a range of benefits it should not be an objective in and of itself. The Transport Act Section 70 include efficiency (among the four primary objectives of the legislation). Efficiency, clarity and certainty maybe more important than simplicity, so this quality is not always unambiguously desirable.
h) Greater clarity and consistency of message in the strategy of the trade-off for carbon v noise from the DfT and CAA and more formal guidance should be provided on whether the right trade-offs are being provided in the formative stages of the work.
i) Some members would welcome reassurance from the CAA regarding its full commitment to the programme.

Drivers for change

The CAA have been able to get most drivers for change, but our members have highlighted the following:

*   To emphasise efficiency.

- International obligations are briefly mentioned but could be strengthened to acknowledge the international standards to which operators, including UK operators are required to comply around the globe.
- To highlight modernising legacy technology, such as the DVOR rationalisation programme, which is not mentioned. This is a significant driver and is likely to be for several years to come and no doubt will be followed by the transition from other existing legacy technologies.
- To maximise the utilisation of technology both in terms of Air Traffic Management, UAS integration and aircraft PBN, the current regulations regarding rules of the air and separation standards, which currently exclude UAS, would need to be reviewed and considered to reflect the advancements in technology.
- With emphasis on space-based navigation and systems there should also be a stronger emphasis on cyber security and redundancy management.

Stakeholders

Our members view that most groups have been identified but the following should also be considered:

- Aircraft Manufacturers
- While the need of passengers is briefly captured this seems inadequate given the overarching driver is to meet demand more sustainably. Passengers are driving demand, and this should be drawn out more explicitly and in more detail. We can assume that commercial passengers will continue to be the most significant users of UK airspace during the timeframe of the Strategy, and this should be reflected in the drivers for change.
- The consultation could identify the stakeholders a little more clearly with possibly having a 'Benefits and Impacts' and then 'stakeholders'.

Views on the delivery elements of the Draft AMS

It is important to bear in mind that airports' capital expenditure budget have been decimated by the pandemic – round £10bn of revenue was lost over the worst two years of the crisis. To ensure AM is delivered in the timeframe set out airports may need further support from Government – successful progression is still not a given. We have the following feedback on the delivery elements:

- The grouping of the nine delivery elements into two distinct categories: Aircraft Based Navigation and Airspace Management is helpful, but caution needs to be exercised when these descriptions are used in other ways, ie Airspace Management has a strict technical definition.
- Aspects of the programme, for example around deployment of technologies, is better placed here as part of the coordinated UK ASM rather than through legislation. This allows for a more holistic view to be taken across various integrated aspects of the strategy rather than more cumbersome and rigid legislation.
- More broadly there could be more reference of the contribution of the various delivery elements to system and network resilience.

- There should also be a focus on the outcomes for sponsors/airports to achieve. Hence identifying clear objectives of the AMS and that subsequent SI's for development and deployment concentrate on the outcomes and objectives desired rather than the solutions. GANP alignment frameworks would instead facilitate policy guidance for research funding gaps etc but *not as* requirements for legislation for implementation.
- Under Airspace Management: 6. 'Data Services' there should be a bullet about: "Control of Distribution".

Views on the Part 3 of the AMS to whom is responsible for deploying the delivery 'elements' and related activities, and how.

It is important at the outset to highlight that the costs of airspace modernisation are fairly shared across all beneficiaries. Costs need to be apportioned accurately between beneficiaries. The following are views provided by members:

- The UK AMS is the appropriate means through which to set out the obligations for those stakeholders responsible for developing and deploying the delivery elements. Rather than legislation as previously mentioned.
- In relation to the assessment of progress against the Strategy, consideration could be given to the identification of Key Performance Indicators or Measures of Success / Effect across many of the delivery elements.
- Related to the assessment of progress, it would be good to provide clarification of the expected process for future revision of the strategy. A timeline will not be in a constant state of change (ie state that the strategy will be reviewed again x years from now). We suggest a future review would focus on parts 2 and 3 rather than Part 1, which should largely remain constant.
- To open up usage of airspace to potentially vastly more users, we would need a clear live picture of UK airspace. To enable maximum use of novel aircraft, this would need to be less costly than existing methods – ie radar. It should also be noted that low level (below 10,000 ft) surveillance coverage is limited or non-existent in certain areas of the country.
- We would also note that in the UK only NATS & Global ATS are the only two training providers for ATS/ATCO/CNS, and the latter is a service provider for NATS. Therefore to meet future training/upscaling for technical demands and mitigate a monopoly of training services, consideration of additional /new entry of training providers for the future should be given to support both the regulatory and interoperability environment.
- When it comes to light zero emission aircraft, it is possible that there is merit in giving them special treatment. But small autonomous units should not automatically be given priority as, whilst zero emission at point of use, they will not always be an energy efficient form of travel – ie in urban contexts lower energy surface transport alternatives may exist. Development of a low energy, as well as zero emission at point of use / net zero transport system, should be the focus. The scale of benefits from larger traditional aircraft to communities must also be borne in mind.

Views on the AMS Governance

The Minister for Aviation mentioned at the end of the ASB meeting in November 2021 that DfT will be undertaking a review of the Board and its ToR. AOA have responded to the survey.

The following are some of the pertinent points made by our members regarding governance but there is a perception from members that in terms of governance there is lack of clarity in its process, visibility, engagement and communications of decisions and how they are arrived. There are concerns that airports are given the opportunity for initial views but that there is then little to no further dialogue before decisions are taken within ACOG:

- A member said that ICAMS have been effective in industry communications and provides the industry with an overview of the strategy.
- ICCAN were previously engaged with the AMS, and with the CAA taking over the majority of these responsibilities it would be good to understand if the new CAA Environmental Panel will be engaged similarly.
- Concerns about the decisions ACOG makes with little input from airports.
- Connecting the overarching sustainability ambitions and working with the relevant environmental groups and interested parties and bringing them on the journey from the start will become increasingly important.
- Independent co-ordination function for the airspace change, including an independent funding mechanism and provision of facilities
- A review of the associated supporting groups and governance process around the AMS; there are currently an array of groups covering similar ground which are being passed information to slightly different stakeholders as informs, but there are no active working groups developing/progressing content. This leaves all but one of the ACP sponsors without influence on the development of the masterplan. Instead, there is a need for *engagement* groups with some stakeholders/sponsors to input to and influence directly the content of masterplan.
- Important that FASI ACP sponsors have a clear and direct governance path to influence and engage upon aspects impacting the ACP delivery of airspace modernisation airspace changes in FASI – perhaps within one or more empowered working groups and overseen by the programme board with amended ToR.
- The pandemic makes it difficult to assess how effective the governance structure has been.
- There is a clear gap still: how are conflicts resolved between the various airports when we get further down the line, e.g. iteration 3, 4 and beyond of the Airspace Modernisation Masterplan.
- It is not fully clear yet how, for example, how airports can remain on the ASB or the ACOG Steering Committee if they're materially being affected by decisions
- Important to understand what happens when ACOG for instance sends its Masterplan to the CAA to what happens after that process. Is it transparent how the CAA comes to its decisions?
- Does the CAA have sufficient resources to cope with this large infrastructure project?

What changes to governance are needed to deliver the broader strategy, including future approaches to funding?

We need to be clear at the outset that for the Strategy to be implemented successfully, the Government must play a more active role, rather than simply acting as sponsor of airspace modernisation. Government leadership needs to be front and centre of the of this major infrastructure project. This would be the case for other transport projects such as rail and road so why not for aviation. As such there is a need for stronger statements of Government leadership. The Government's role as a strategic leader must also extend to building an understanding and acceptance among local communities that even those flightpaths change that reduce noise for most people will not always do so for all.

There is a huge risk if the finances aren't resolved satisfactorily in terms of funding of Airspace Modernisation as airports will take many years to recover from the pandemic, and will struggle to fund future stages themselves.

The AMS does not address and has been mentioned above all those who are to benefit from Airspace Modernisation (and it will not be just airports). Thus, how will other beneficiaries be asked to contribute to this upgrade such as drone operators?

On the idea of a Deployment Steering Group, from our perspective that is what ACOG is for. It is difficult to see how more groups will resolve the financial and decision-making flaws of the current approach (e.g. lack of clear lines of escalation between airports). There is perhaps the possibility that ACOG could be expanded to cover the delivery elements from which it is missing. There are also aircraft manufacturers, including drone and space flight manufacturers who have an important part in this and should be involved in getting the aircraft to be able to align with the AMS delivery elements.