



Department
for Transport

Executive Summary

UK Airspace Policy Consultation

Moving Britain Ahead

January 2017

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Introduction

- 1 The Aviation industry is a major contributor to the UK economy. It connects us to people and markets all across the world and shows that Britain is open for business.
- 2 While our aviation sector is a success story, supporting thousands of jobs and delivering billions of pounds in economic benefits, we need to take action to meet the continuing growth in demand for air travel. Not only is there a need for additional airport capacity in the south east to support this growth, but our airspace arrangements, which date back nearly fifty years, are also in need of modernisation.
- 3 Our current airspace system is inefficient and means passengers face longer journeys and delays as airspace becomes more congested. This will only get worse - it is expected that by 2030 there will be 3,100 days' worth of delays – 50 times the amount seen in 2015, along with 8,000 cancellations a year¹. Inefficient airspace arrangements also means more emissions from longer journeys and prevents improvements being made that could reduce noise for communities around airports, for example by removing the need for holding stacks for aircraft unable to land and making better use of new technologies which allows aircraft to better avoid overflying populated areas.
- 4 To maintain the UK's status as one of the world's most important aviation hubs, we therefore need to take action to update our airspace arrangements. This will also help us to deliver sustainable growth of the aviation sector by ensuring environmental considerations are at the heart of how the sector operates, building on last year's ground-breaking international agreement to tackle carbon emissions from aviation.
- 5 But decisions which change flightpaths are not easy. Even those that reduce noise for most people will not do so for all, and some may experience more noise than before. We need a policy framework which ensures that when these difficult decisions are made they take account of communities' views, are based on robust evidence and consider local circumstances.
- 6 As a crucial part of developing our new aviation strategy over the coming months, this consultation is designed to ensure there we have the correct framework in place to allow this modernisation of our airspace, to deliver benefits to passengers, the economy and local communities.
- 7 We are therefore bringing forward proposals designed to balance the interests of all involved and build trust in how noise is handled. Our proposals aim to deliver:
 - Greater clarity and transparency in decision making and the way noise is managed;
 - Improvements in the evidence used to inform how airspace decisions are made, particularly on the noise impacts;
 - Greater focus on industry and communities working together to find ways to manage noise which work best for local circumstances;
 - Clarity and consistency in who makes airspace decisions, and why;
 - Greater certainty for industry that the airspace change framework provides what they need to deliver beneficial change; and

¹ Department for Transport, 2015, *Upgrading UK Airspace: Strategic Rationale*

- Ambitious noise management outside of airspace change, taking advantage of the latest technological developments.
- 8 Our proposals build on the best practice which is already being demonstrated at many airports across the UK, and the changes to the airspace change process which the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is making.
- 9 Everyone will have their part to play in making reforms to how airspace is managed a success, including airports, airlines, air navigation service providers, local authorities, community representatives and the CAA. Our proposals create clear and appropriate roles, and a system which can support the UK in maximising the benefits of aviation.

Summary of Proposals

Changes to Airspace

- 10 Chapter 4 of our consultation document makes various proposals about who should make decisions on different types (or tiers) of airspace changes.
- For Tier 1 changes, which are changes to the permanent structure of UK airspace that are already covered by the CAA's formal airspace change process, we propose that the Secretary of State should have a call-in function. This would mean that when airspace changes meet one or more specified criteria, the Secretary of State could make the final decision.
 - Tier 2 changes, are planned and permanent changes to Air-Traffic Control's day-to-day operational procedures that currently fall outside of the CAA's airspace change process. We propose that when these are expected to cause a certain level of noise, air navigation service providers should engage with local communities and the CAA should assess the proposal against various factors before deciding whether to approve it. The CAA would be responsible for establishing a suitable and proportionate process for these changes, including on the nature and level of consultation that is required.
 - Tier 3 covers changes to operations, which may or may not be planned, such as changes in the number of type of aircraft using a particular route or shifts over time in how aircraft follow a particular route. We propose that the CAA puts in place a suitable process for industry to follow. This should be a light-touch approach and set out expectations on transparency and engagement with communities, including on potential ways to mitigate adverse impacts.

Compensation

- 11 Chapter 4 also sets out proposals to update the compensation policy for airspace changes.
- We propose that those experiencing changes in noise as a result of changes to airspace should in future expect the same compensation as that associated with new infrastructure (such as a new runway).
 - Currently, to be eligible for financial assistance towards insulation, a property must be within an eligible noise contour (63dB LAeq or above) **and** have experienced a minimum 3dB change. We propose to remove this second requirement so that any property within that contour should be considered in the same way.

- We also propose to update our policy to encourage airports to consider compensation for significantly increased overflight even if properties do not fall inside the eligible average noise contours. These decisions should be based on the local circumstances and economics of the change proposal.
- Our current compensation policy says that those who live within the highest noise contours (69dB LAeq or higher) should receive assistance with the costs of moving. We propose to include a requirement of an offer of full insulation to be paid for by the airport for homes within this contour, where the home owners do not want to move.

Making Airspace Change Decisions Transparently

12 Chapter 5 of our consultation deals with how noise should be factored into airspace changes.

- To ensure airspace decisions are made transparently and that communities understand why a particular option has been chosen, we propose that sponsors of an airspace change should be required to carry out an options analysis as part of the airspace change process.
- We propose that decisions on how aircraft noise is best distributed should be informed by local circumstances and consideration of different options. Consideration should include the pros and cons of concentrating traffic on single routes, which normally reduce the number of people overflowed, versus the use of multiple routes which can provide greater relief or respite from noise.
- Alongside noise impacts, assessment should also consider the impacts on carbon and air quality and explain how these have been balanced in line with the Government's environmental objectives with respect to air navigation.

13 Chapter 5 also deals with how noise impacts on people, including those on health and quality of life, should be assessed. We also discuss how these impacts should be used to inform decisions on airspace changes, in order to deliver our overall policy on aviation noise **'to limit and, where possible, reduce the number of people in the UK significantly affected by aircraft noise, as part of a policy of sharing benefits of noise reduction between industry and communities in support of sustainable development'**.

- The Government currently recognises an average noise level of 57dB LAeq as marking the approximate onset of significant community annoyance. We recognise that there are people exposed to noise levels lower than this who consider themselves annoyed and people exposed to higher levels of noise who do not. We propose to clarify that our overall aviation noise policy should be understood to limit and, where possible reduce the number of people experiencing adverse effects from aircraft noise, not the number of people within a specific noise contour.
- So that the adverse effects from aviation noise can be properly assessed, we propose these should be measured using the Department for Transport's webTAG tool².

² WebTAG can provide a monetised value for the impact of changes in noise exposure, based on Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs). More information can be found at : <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/webtag-tag-unit-a3-environmental-impact-appraisal-december-2015>

- We also propose that other metrics which measure the frequency and pattern of aircraft communities may be exposed to should also inform decisions and to help communities understand the impact of proposed changes.

Independent Commission on Civil Aviation Noise

14 Chapter 6 of our consultation document sets out our proposals for an Independent Commission on Civil Aviation Noise (ICCAN) to support upcoming airspace changes. ICCAN would aim to build trust between industry and communities and make sure noise impacts are properly and transparently considered.

- We propose that ICCAN's functions should be to:
 - Advise on airspace change, providing assurance that noise has been considered and mitigated where possible.
 - Advise on planning decisions and ongoing noise management.
 - Promote and publish best practice guidance
 - Review or commission research to present new evidence.
 - Monitor noise measurements and how these are reported, to build trust and improve transparency and credibility.
- We also explore options for structure and governance and funding of ICCAN to ensure its credibility and put forward our lead option for it to be established as an independent body attached to the Civil Aviation Authority.

Ongoing Noise Management

15 Chapter 7 details our proposals for how noise should be managed at all airports. We want decisions on noise to be made locally where possible, with the Government's involvement focussed only on strategic decisions.

- We believe that operating restrictions should be agreed through the planning system where possible and propose that:
 - For operating restrictions associated with strategically significant decisions: The Secretary of State would be the competent authority for all operating restrictions delivered through the planning process in the case of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), as well as any local planning decisions that are called-in by or appealed to the Secretary of State.
 - For all other planning-related operating restrictions: The local authority deciding on a planning application would be the competent authority.
- For those occasions when operating restrictions may be brought forward by an airport outside of the planning process, such as resulting from Noise Action Plans or similar processes, we propose that the CAA would be the competent authority for approving any such restrictions.

16 We also propose to allow the designated airports; Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted, to manage noise in a way that best reflects the issues faced by their local communities.

- We propose that the noise controls (other than operating restrictions) currently set by the Government, such as departure noise limits, continuous descent approaches and noise-preferential routes, are transferred to the airports. This would be consistent with other airports and would see Government's involvement

focussed on strategic decision making. Local decisions could be informed by ICCAN best practice in future.

- To provide greater transparency to communities about where and how often aircraft are actually flying, and to make it easier to see changes over time, we are proposing that the designated airports should publish data on their departure routes and track keeping performance. We also intend to encourage all major UK airports to publish similar data in the interests of transparency where practicable. The exact information published should be determined by the airports, in consultation with local communities.

Conclusions

- 17 The Government's aim is to ensure that the airspace policy framework is up to the challenges ahead in modernising airspace and delivering the new northwest runway at Heathrow.
- 18 The diagram below illustrates our intended framework for airspace. It shows that ongoing noise management and locally significant planning decisions should be taken at the local level, informed by engagement with all stakeholders, including communities. We expect industry to continuously seek improvements in its noise performance where practicable, to engage with communities, and to consider noise when delivering airspace modernisation.
- 19 Airspace change decisions must be taken by the CAA, as it has the expertise to ensure that decisions prioritise safety while balancing all of the factors that must be taken into account, including local views. There will also be some occasions when it is appropriate for the Government to take the decision. Some airport planning decisions, including Heathrow expansion, are clearly significant for the whole of the UK. As the Government has responsibility for whether such Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) go ahead, it is also right that Government ensures that communities are properly protected during such developments. There will be other decisions in the airspace change process which could have significant impacts on the environment or the UK's wider interests and Government also has a role in balancing these complex and competing priorities. We have therefore developed clear criteria for when decisions go beyond those which are best made through the local or regulator processes and require Government to intervene.
- 20 The new Independent Commission on Civil Aviation Noise (ICCAN) will improve the foundations of decision making by facilitating more effective engagement and accessible communication of noise impacts and management options. This improved dialogue will feed into decisions not only at a local level, but through the CAA and Government alike. ICCAN will also drive improvements in the standards of ongoing noise management, providing best practice so that decisions on noise controls can be made based on the latest information and options available.
- 21 Our consultation sets out our view on how decisions on airspace and noise should be made, and by whom. The changes proposed would ensure that decisions can be made which better support the effective management of airspace and the noise impacts which its use can create. These proposals aim to strike a balance between the benefits of a thriving aviation sector for passengers and the economy with its impacts on local communities and the environment.

Further information

- 22 This executive summary of our consultation documents provides an overview of our proposals and the improvements we expect them to deliver. A more detailed analysis of our proposals, along with further information on the consultation process and how you can respond to our proposals, is available in our full consultation document.
- 23 The consultation period began on 2nd February and will run until 25th May 2017. Please ensure that your response reaches us before the closing date.
- 24 Alongside this consultation, we are also consulting on revised Air Navigation Guidance. The aim of this is to enable those who would like to understand how our policies would be implemented the opportunity to see draft guidance. Respondents to the consultation will be able to provide feedback on the draft guidance as well as the high level policies should they wish.
- 25 Further supporting information for our consultation is also available online.