

ADDRESSING AIRPORT INFRASTRUCTURE CAPACITY

Contribution to the EU HIGH LEVEL GROUP FOR THE FUTURE EUROPEAN AVIATION REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

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1. Background

Under the Single European Sky and the implementing SESAR initiative, the chief objective is the creation of additional ATM capacity so as to allow by 2020 for up to 2 fold increase in movements.

The creation of additional ATM capacity is a key element in relation to the other objectives that have been set: safety (improvement factor of 10), environment (10% impact reduction) and costs for users (50% reduction). The creation of additional ATM capacity also reflects the importance of air transport infrastructure in the context of the Lisbon Strategy. A sound and efficient aviation infrastructure is indeed indispensable for the competitiveness of the European economy.

However, this objective is endangered by the looming airport capacity crunch that Europe is facing.

2. The 2004 Eurocontrol/ECAC "Challenge to growth" report and SESAR Definition Phase

The 2004 Eurocontrol/ECAC "Challenge to growth" and SESAR have sent clear warning signals regarding the critical airport capacity situation and its impact.

2.1 The 2004 "challenge to growth" report reveals that:

- despite a 60% potential capacity increase of the airport network, and
- despite a maximum achievable airport capacity scenario, which is based on better use of existing capacity at all airports ("maximised capacity" though systematic implementation of best practices) and assumes the building of all already planned infrastructure developments,

the situation is quickly deteriorating into a capacity imbalance (capacity shortage in parts of the network with remaining capacity surplus in other parts). Although demand will grow even faster at smaller airports compared to larger airports, the capacity crunch will affect mainly the larger airports - where demand exercises stronger pressure. It should be noted that those airports usually coincide with the nodes of the ATM network. Ultimately, in 2025:

- More than 60 airports congested will be congested and the top 20 airports saturated almost all day long.
- 3,7 million flights will be unaccommodated, affecting 260 million passengers.

2.2 The SESAR Definition Phase has recognised the impact of this situation on ATM system capacity:

"At present, capacity at airports – their infrastructural, environmental and political constraints, together with the terminal airspace around them is the primarily limiting factor of overall ATM system capacity." (SESAR D1)

"Airport capacity developments at the nodes will have to keep pace with the capacity improvements in airspace as a result of the SESAR initiative."(SESAR D1).

This situation will impact not only the ATM capacity objective but also the safety, environmental and costs objectives set out by SES and the ATM Master Plan for 2020. Fundamentally, this situation threatens the ability of Europe to develop a sound and efficient air transport infrastructure and potentially impacts its competitiveness.

3. The need to go beyond better use of existing capacity

The Communication adopted by the Commission on 24 January "An Action plan for airport capacity, efficiency and safety in Europe" fully recognises the above mentioned negative impact of the airport capacity crunch.

It proposes a set of action at EU level, the progress of which shall be monitored by an observatory. These actions are mainly focused on promoting a better use of existing airport capacity, coupled with a consistent approach to safety at airports, the promotion of co-modality, improved environmental capacity, improved co-ordination for the planning of new infrastructure and the recourse to new technologies.

These actions are much needed and will certainly help, but they will not be sufficient to address to any significant degree the airport capacity crunch and its negative consequences:

- As already mentioned above, the 2004 "Challenge to growth" report already assumes a scenario of maximised capacity at European airports through systematic implementation of best practices, which are more or less the same measures as those envisaged by the Commission Communication for the better use of existing capacity.
- The 2004 "Challenge to growth" report clearly highlights the need to create new infrastructure. It considers that the only alternative is the creation of reliever airports in the vicinity of their counterparts and that there could be a market for up to 10 new major airports and 15 medium sized airports.

Consequently, there is a need to promote the creation of new airport capacity.

4. Promoting the creation of new infrastructure

Airport policy, planning and development is a State competence which very often involves decisions at local level.

Whereas airports act as engines of local economic growth, they also involve local environmental issues (noise and air quality). Such issues are a significant and increasing constraint on the capacity of the airport system as they have a tendency to limit the use of existing capacity, delay or even prevent the creation of new

infrastructure. As this constraint results in congestion both on the ground and in the air, it involves a negative global environmental impact (climate change). As a result, in order to address effectively the airport capacity crunch and its wide ranging negative consequences, it is essential to influence political decision making on airport capacity by promoting at European level the creation of new infrastructure. The objective should be to ensure that States take into account the broader European capacity issue and contribute to it.

This requires an EU airport capacity policy at the same level as the EU ATM capacity policy, within a total system approach to aviation capacity.

5. Recommendations

5. 1. Key principles for an effective EU policy on airport capacity

- The EU policy on airport capacity should build on the existing Commission Communication.
- The EU policy on airport capacity should recognise the need to create new infrastructure to effectively address the looming airport capacity crunch.
- The EU policy on airport capacity should include a set of measures aimed at incentivising the creation of new airport capacity. These measures shall not question the national competences on airport policy, planning and development, but act as a driver for Member States to create new infrastructure.
- The EU policy on airport capacity should ensure that the EU regulatory framework applicable to airports does not act as a disincentive to capacity development (including from a financial point of view).
- The EU policy on airport capacity should be based on a total system approach involving full coordination with SESAR and SES.
- The EU policy on airport capacity should gain more political visibility and become a top priority within the EU Transport Policy.

5.2. Proposed set of measures

- Creation of an **EU Airport Capacity Enhancement Plan (ACEP)** to be managed by the European Commission, in close partnership with the industry and the Member States. The measures below are all part of the ACEP.
- An **ACEP Champion/Coordinator** to be appointed to ensure maximum political visibility, work to monitor progress and remove obstacles at national/local level where they exist, liaise with SES and SESAR.

She/He would look at and make recommendations regarding the coherence of the EU regulatory framework applying to airports from a capacity promotion perspective. She/He would communicate the key economic benefits that airports generate. She/He would disseminate the best practices guidelines on airport planning and land use.

- The **Observatory on airport capacity** (already provided for in the Commission Communication) to monitor airport capacity developments at

EU level in close cooperation/jointly with ACI EUROPE. Such monitoring would involve:

- **Airport capacity report** every two years:
 - Assessment of existing capacity (including individual airport charts);
 - Demand forecast
 - Capacity development forecast (based on authorised developments, including individual airports charts)
 - Future capacity forecast (including individual airport charts)
 - Capacity gap analysis
 - Analysis of economic impact of the capacity gap
- **Economic impact assessment of the capacity gap.**
- **Best practices guidelines on airport planning and land use to be adopted by the Commission.**
- **Observatory reports to be presented by the Commission and the ACEI Champion/Coordinator to the Transport Council and the Competitiveness Council, with possible recommendations to Member States.**

Such recommendations may include the production by Member States of national master plans on airport capacity.

- **Reconsideration of the existing framework as regards financing of airport infrastructure:**
 - European funding: aviation infrastructure presently disadvantaged compared to rail/road. Need to make available EU funds for airport accessibility/co-modality projects as well as for environmental projects. Support for project in new Member States.
 - Ensure that economic regulation of airports does not act as disincentive for capacity developments.