

The logo for ACI Europe is a light blue square containing the letters 'ACI' in a large, white, serif font. Below 'ACI', the word 'EUROPE' is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. A dark blue curved line sweeps across the logo from the bottom left towards the top right.

**ACI EUROPE POSITION  
on  
GROUND COORDINATOR**

**AIRPORTS COUNCIL  
INTERNATIONAL**

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# **Airport operations as part of the aviation network operations: towards a role as ground coordinators for local capacity**

## **The contribution of European Airport Operators to the Single European Sky**

### **1. Background**

The Single European Sky (SES) project will shape a European Aviation Network and airports as well as airport operators will be integrated into this network. So far, most ground operations at our airports have been carried out in isolation. But the fast introduction of A-CDM and integration of the airports into the ATM network will change this modus operandi significantly. Just as airspace capacity needs a network management function, operations at and around airports will need to be coordinated in the most optimal way to make best use of the local capacity to be fed into the network. In the recently published “Better Airports Package”, the European Commission calls for a collaborative approach from all stakeholders in order to reach optimal use of existing capacity. Airports and airport operators are a critical part in this process since they are the nodes of the European Aviation network. Airport operators need to facilitate and coordinate the operations at and around airports with the goal to provide more local capacity. This ground coordination function and the network management need to act as a tandem to provide the capacity the future European Aviation network needs.

The expression “airports as ground coordinators” is increasingly used and this document shall outline in more detail what it could mean as well as the future implications for European Airport Operators.

### **2. Context**

The context is twofold. First, despite the economic downturn, the European Aviation system is still growing. Airport operators need to contribute and address quality to promote growth, connectivity and sustainable mobility. More airplanes will be flying, making more use of congested airspace and ground infrastructure (runway or terminals capacity). The decision making and delivery of new physical infrastructure is very complex and too long in Europe. It takes a lot of political courage to take the required long term decisions and this political courage is often lacking. For its part, the European Commission has endorsed the concept of optimizing the use of local capacity.

Secondly, the main European project for the aviation sector is the Single European Sky and a key element within SES is the integration of airports into the network. How can airport operators tackle the challenge of providing local capacity for future growth? We believe that one of the key elements will be to act as a facilitator and coordinator of operations at and around our airports.

### **3. Scope of the ground coordination function**

The scope of the ground coordination function is a threefold consideration which includes technical enablers vs. governance issues; potential enlargement of the concept and type of airports.



The need for a ground coordination function is linked to the European Aviation Network and the integration of airports into the network but also from the separation of functions within airports. In the past, different operations such as airport operator, ground handling and ATC used to be performed by one entity, either the State itself or a single State owned company. Through successive liberalization policies, the European Commission has unbundled the function and companies (public or private) took over the various roles while sometimes the State remained a player (as is the case for some ANSP). This business development took place in a fast growing economic environment and more or less in isolation. Clearly, the various stakeholders did not pay enough attention to the collaborative element of operations at and around airports. This was not the case at small airports where the airport still acts as a ground coordination and this without any intervention from the regulators. Therefore, the ground coordination function is about reviving the collaborative spirit with the support of IT information sharing, decision making processes and network orientated procedures.

ACI EUROPE is looking at the development of the ground coordination function as it relates to operations at airports within the framework of the Single European Sky. However, once developed and mature, the concept could also be used to enhance environmental operations, landside accessibility, terminal operations including customs and immigration, etc. In fact, the ground coordination function as it relates to the Single European Sky can be seen as a first step towards Total Airport Management. This paper does not address the technical issues linked to the development of the ground coordinator function. This work is being done in the SESAR WP6 and 12: airport operations and airport systems. Representatives of the major airport hubs, along with other partners in the project, are developing the technical enablers to set up the Airport Operations Plan and integrate this plan into the Network Operations Plan. Therefore, the focus of this paper is mainly on governance issues for the set-up of the ground coordination function.

#### **4. The issue of responsibility.**

The most important issue in the development of the ground coordination function is the legal consequences of taking responsibility to facilitate and coordinate operations at and around airports. This is a “stop” or “go” issue. Quite clearly, airport operators cannot become responsible for the quality of the operations provided by ground handlers, airlines and Air traffic control. Instead, by taking-up the ground coordinator function, airport operators should take the responsibility to facilitate and coordinate, but not the end responsibility for the quality of operations performed by ground handlers, airlines and ATC. The result of the ground coordination function is a joint responsibility. This is also the way in which it is reflected in the most important regulatory framework so far: i.e. the performance Regulation for ATM and the Groundhandling Regulation. Regarding slots, the responsibilities of the different actors are laid down in the slots Regulation.

Should regulators consider transferring the responsibility for the operations of other players at airports, then airport operators will have to pull out of the ground coordination function.

#### **5. The strategic importance**

The European Commission in its policy documents relating to capacity routinely refers to the need to make optimal use of existing (local) capacity. However, even making best use of existing capacity will not solve the capacity crunch at some of Europe’s busiest nodes in the network, the hub airports. In fact, at these locations partners in operations at and around airports are already performing close to making best use of existing local



capacity. Furthermore, even if we can expect the future Eurocontrol study on airport capacity to show a delay in growth compared to the previous one, there will still be a need for additional infrastructure at some of the key nodes of the network.

There are good reasons why airport operators and other players at airports need to embrace the concept of making “best use of local capacity”:

- a. We can get additional capacity out of the system by linking air and ground capacity and move towards a system based on predictability;
- b. Local capacity is at the core of the most vital elements of airport management: generating revenues (both aeronautical and non-aeronautical) and profit; providing connectivity/mobility in a sustainable, environmentally friendly way and shareholder value creation.
- c. Last but not least: local capacity and the way we use it, is our main license to grow.

The strategic benefit of the ground coordination function is to make maximum or optimal use of local capacity thereby contributing to an optimal return on investment for airport operators’ shareholders.

The public opinion expects good environmental performance of airport operators and all of those operating at and around airports. This is increasingly perceived to be a normal, natural way of operating an airport. This in itself will certainly not be enough to secure the much needed new capacity at airports. No matter how good the environmental performance of an airport, without additional capacity, airports and airport operators will not be able to grow.

## **6. Description of the concept.**

Future operations will have ground and airborne sectors fully integrated reflecting an integrated management of air transport capacity. The prerequisite for the Ground coordinator function is the Airport Collaborative Decision Making model where local circumstances and local coordination are being taken into consideration. Airport operators need to step in and take control not only of the processes on the ground but also the airspace processes that are directly linked to the airport ground operations. This is the only way that airport operators will be able to maximize the use of their own scarce capacity whilst still maintaining a high level of safety and service quality for their customers. A-CDM is a powerful tool and has proved to increase the communication on the ground between all stakeholders resulting in significant benefits. A-CDM is mainly about sharing: sharing of information and data but also sharing of respect for the different business models of the various actors operating on the airport. Most of all it is about sharing the know-how within the staff of the different organizations. While A-CDM is supported by IT it cannot be reduced to being only an IT tool. Open culture and willingness to share is required to be successful in the first step.

Operations at and around airports will face two successive important (r)evolutions in the next decade: from isolated operations performed by partners on a single airport towards collaborative operations on a single airport. A number of airports have already achieved this stage with local A-CDM. The second evolution will be to work in a network environment instead of a single airport environment. This is the first step of exchange and information sharing with the Network through FUM/DPI messages. This means that the airport is connected into the European ATM network. So far, only a few airports have achieved this stage. The process of linking airports with the network needs to be accelerated. Work is being done within the SJU to address adverse weather conditions and translate this into an enhanced A-CDM tool.

In the future all airports will share a minimum data set with the Network Manager which will allow airport operators, ground coordinators, and the Network Manager to switch from a re-active management to a pro-active management. Predictability will become much more important for the operations at and around airports. A-CDM will become a rolling Airport Operations Plan (AOP) that is constantly updated in the Network Operations Plan.

A lot of information and data will be available and shared. To keep this information flow effective and manageable, some kind of steering is needed and therefore the AOP business model is crucial. The AOP will be at the crossroads of the information flow that is needed to put in practice the ground coordination function. The AOP for the ground coordination function and the NOP (Network Operations Plan) for the network management function are the two sides of the coin. Airport operators need to step in and take the lead of AOP.

The ground coordination function is the airport operator's contribution to the ATM network. The ground coordination function will need to be in charge of capacity at (and around) airports, while the network management function is in charge of capacity in the air (en route and TMA). Consequently, the ground coordination function will be the single point of contact for the network management function. The Network Operations Plan (NOP) will come from the network management function while the Airport Operations Plan (AOP) will come from the ground coordination function. Both plans will be merged for operations.

### **Together with the network manager, the ground coordinators form the future ATM network backbone**

To make the ground coordination function a reality we face the following challenges:

- **Authority:** Where/How can airport operators be empowered by regulators to take up the ground coordination function? (cf. 7. The link with other regulatory texts)
- **Responsibility:** By taking-up the ground coordinator function, airport operators take the responsibility to make the effort to facilitate and coordinate, not the end responsibility for the result of the operations performed by ground handlers, airlines and ATC. The result of the ground coordination function is a joint responsibility. This baseline needs to be set in stone in the regulatory document that empowers airport operators to perform a ground coordination function.
- **Agreements – procedures- rules - policies:** The agreements, procedures and policies need to be local, elaborated and established in an open and collaborative culture and need to contribute to the performance targets for airports. The baseline is that stakeholders retain ownership of their data and interact with the AOP through agreed Rules & Procedures.
- **Infrastructure: Airports with a ground coordination function will need to have some kind of OPS Center** in place which coordinates locally all stakeholders considered relevant by the ground coordinator! This Ops Center can be a physical location where staff members of the different players at the airport get together in one room with a view to ensure the coordination or it can be a virtual Ops Center where the same work is done in an ITC environment.

## **7. SWOT.**

- **Strengths and opportunities for airport operators**



- We own the infrastructure.
  - We are the nodes in the network.
  - We are data providers.
  - We are or will become experienced in the A-CDM process.
  
  - New relationship with the users of the airport.
  - Best use of local capacity in all senses of the term.
  - Manage our licence to grow.
  - Contribute to the network instead of being controlled by the network.
  - Play a central role in operating SWIM.
  - Create additional shareholder value.
- **Weaknesses and threats**
- No unified data yet.
  - No common interoperable systems in Europe.
  - Limited human resources available.
  - Brand new concept without common agreed content (agreements – procedures – policies).
  
  - Local capacity is controlled and distributed in function of en route capacity.
  - Regulators and semi regulators take over tactical decisions about the use of local capacity.
  - Unable to convince the airport owners of the need to engage.
  - Licence to grow is not in our hands any more.

## **8. The link with regulatory texts.**

The role of ground coordinator could be incorporated in the European Commission Regulation 677/2011 concerning the rules for the implementation of the ATM Network Functions. Inspiration might be taken from the way in which the Network Management Function has been set up. This means a build up with chapters on the establishment of the Ground Coordination Function for the management of local capacity, tasks of the Ground Coordinator function, the Airport Operations Plan, competences of the Ground Coordinator, Relations with local stakeholders and general requirements of the Ground Coordination Function.

For the concept of ground coordinator to become a reality implies that all parts of the Ground Coordination Function – regulated outside the proposed adaptation of EC Regulation 677/2011 – will need to be covered by regulatory provisions that make it possible. Concrete examples are the introduction of minimum requirements and coordination instruments for ground handling activities, appropriate provisions in the revision of EC Regulation 95/93 on slots, etc.

## **9. Conclusion and way forward.**

The Single European Sky may impact airport operators much more than any other actor in the aviation sector. This is both a threat and an opportunity. For airport operators to take up the role of Ground Coordinators would be our contribution to the Single European Sky and the EC performance framework for the ATM network. It is for airport operators the essential element to integrate airports into the network. The Ground Coordinator function will be key in the future if airport operators want to stay in control of operations at their airports. The ground coordinator function will be a central point in strategy development for airports in the next 10 years. Congested airports without A-



CDM – which itself would pave the way to a well-developed ground coordination function – risk losing out and play in a second league. The ground coordination function can be developed by airport operators as the counterpart of the network manager with a view to manage local capacity.

Network performance and local capacity management will be the licence to grow our businesses. Environmental performance is part of the network performance as well as part of our daily local capacity management.

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