Airport capacity and groundhandling: towards a more efficient policy

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PURPOSE: to present an action for airport capacity, efficiency and safety in Europe.

CONTENT: the liberalisation of the European air transport sector is a major success. Concrete measures have been taken by the European Community in order to sustain this growth whilst maintaining a high level of safety and efficiency: (i) the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) was created in 2002 in order to rationalise European activities in the field of air worthiness; (ii) the Single European Sky legislative package adopted in 2004 aims at comprehensively reforming of the Air Traffic Management sector, with a view to increasing the safety and efficiency of the European sky.

If demand for air traffic continues in line with current trends, it will double in 20 years. This will clearly have serious environmental implications.

After liberalising the air transport market by the creation of the internal market and addressing the "saturation of the skies" through the Single European Sky initiative, the Commission will now focus on airports. Capacity will not be able to match demand and risks becoming the most constraining factor on air transport. The knock-on network effects of this weakest link threatens the efficiency of the whole air transport chain. Since air transport is seen as a 'motor' for economic growth, this in turn risks undermining the overall competitiveness of the European economy.

This communication on **airport capacity, efficiency and safety in Europe** provides a comprehensive action plan detailing a coherent strategy for responsibly tackling congestion at European airports.

The expected “capacity crunch”: airport capacity is a function of both runway and ground infrastructure. Given the expected traffic evolution, Europe will face an ever growing gap between capacity and demand. This is referred to as the “capacity crunch”. If current capacity levels are not drastically increased, it is estimated that over 60 European airports will be heavily congested and the top 20 airports will be saturated at least 8-10 hours per day by 2025. Such congestion is likely to have a severe impact on airlines' ability to maintain their schedules, especially at hub airports, and will therefore result in a less efficient European air transport industry. Congestion will also result in environmental and safety costs, since the density and complexity of operations will reach an unprecedented level.

The capacity crunch at airports poses a threat to the safety, efficiency and competitiveness of all actors involved in the air transport supply chain.

How to deal with capacity crunch?: there is no “golden bullet” solution available for such a complex issue. Beyond the multiplicity of actors and the very technical nature of operations, planning horizons in the airport sector are also a challenge:

- it takes up to 5 to 10 years or more to provide new infrastructure;

- 1 to 5 years are needed in order to plan and optimise the use of existing runways, including the surrounding airspace.

Between mid-September 2005 and early 2006 the Commission consulted stakeholders to seek possible solutions to address the airport capacity shortfall. Responses from government agencies, airlines, airport

operators, pilots, air navigation service providers, experts, private citizens and environmental organisations all provided valuable input. A main finding of the consultation was that there was a **broad consensus as to the existence of the problem and the need to find market-driven and environmentally sustainable solutions**. Many contributors highlighted the necessity for improved collaboration and information sharing between all actors involved in the operational chain at airports. Discussions on the capacity issue took place during the high level meetings of the Directors General of Civil Aviation under the UK Presidency in 2005 and in Salzburg under the Austrian Presidency in May 2006. As a result of this consultation, a number of actions are listed:

- the need for a **more efficient use of existing runways** and **support for new infrastructure**;
- an appropriate balance between market-led solutions (**market mechanisms for slot allocation**) and **regulatory measures** (Single European Sky and airport safety oversight) must be sought;
- the European Community could also support the airport sector through its financial instruments: TEN-T, European Cohesion Policy's programmes through European Regional Development and the Cohesion Funds (according to the Community Strategic Guidelines for Cohesion and the priorities defined in each programme), or through initiatives such as SESAR (Single European Sky ATM Research);
- in order to promote safety binding Community rules are needed in particular on the safety for the aerodrome air side, including not only the infrastructure, but also operations and management;
- **aviation security** must be a paramount consideration when seeking to increase airport capacity;
- **regional airports** are important to the development of an integrated European air transport network. In this respect, it would be desirable to unlock existing latent capacity at regional airports provided that Member States respect Community legal instruments relating to state aids. Global Navigation Satellite Systems could play a significant role for increasing capacity and flexibility of operations at those airports without increasing the cost of local infrastructure. Member States should endeavour to improve the accessibility of such airports by rail and road to allow them to act as reliever airports.

Given these elements, the Commission will develop five key actions:

1. make better use of existing airport capacity;
2. a consistent approach to air safety operations at aerodromes;
3. promote “co-modality”, the integration and collaboration of the transport modes;
4. improve the environmental capacity of airports and the planning framework for new airport infrastructure;
5. develop and implement cost efficient technological solutions.

The stakeholder consultation confirmed the urgent need for co-ordinated action. This paper proposes a list of concrete actions which could be best taken at EU level. The European Commission shall monitor progress made by setting up an observatory.

The Commission is prepared to take up the challenge of the expected “capacity crunch”. Following intense consultation an action plan is proposed in this paper. This action plan (detailed below) has been designed to strike a balance between legislative proposals, financial support and the promotion of more co-ordinated planning. All actors should collaborate to meet the challenge to further build a more efficient, safe and environmentally sound air transport system in Europe that complies with the ambitious goals of the Lisbon strategy.

The **proposed action plan and calendar of events** are as follows:

- **Early 2007**: the Commission will issue a mandate to Eurocontrol to develop harmonized airport capacity and assessment methodology tools.

- **2007**: an observatory on airport medium term capacity planning under the aegis of the Commission will improve awareness and information on regional capacity needs by delivering an annual report.

- **Quarter 1 2007 for mandate results – 2008 for adaptation of legislation**: the mandate given to Eurocontrol on ATFM measures will propose solutions to ensure consistency between airport slots and flight plans, with the required modifications of relevant legislation.

- **Early 2008**: a legislative proposal on the extension of EASA to airport operations.

- **From 2008**: the Commission will enable the certification of the EGNOS/Galileo signal in space and include GNSS exploitation in the European Radio-Navigation Plan.

- **2007**: a comprehensive inclusion of GNSS into ATM operational processes is expected from the SESAR programme.

- **From 2007 onwards**: funding from the TEN-T, European Cohesion Policy's programmes through the European Regional Development and the Cohesion Funds for eligible co-modality projects.

- **Early 2007**: the Commission intends to encourage integrated air-rail ticketing and will publish a consultation paper on the subject.

- **2007 – 2008**: prepare a report on the implementation of the Noise Directive with a view to amending legislation, if so required.

- **2007**: best practice guidelines and simplification of procedures to be developed to promote coordination of airport plans.

- **From 2007 onwards**: early implementation of mature technologies such as A-SMGCS surveillance and control functions throughout European airports.

- **2007- 2013**: the SESAR programme will further develop new tools and systems that will significantly increase airport capacity.

- **From mid 2007 onwards**: the Commission will also consider the findings and potential impact of the 2007 implementation of the Single European Sky report on airport operations.

- **2008**: the Commission will issue a mandate to Eurocontrol to develop implementing rules on the introduction of Airport-CDM at European airports.