



INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION

First Meeting of the Africa - Indian Ocean Aviation System Planning and Implementation Group (AASPG/1)

Libreville, Gabon, 3 - 7 November 2025.

Agenda Item 4: Implementation of air navigation goals, targets and indicators, including the priorities set in the regional air navigation plan

PROGRESS REPORT ON UPR TRIALS TOWARDS FRA IMPLEMENTATION – FOCUS ON WACAF

(Presented by AFRAA)

SUMMARY
<p>This paper provides an update on the progress achieved in implementing the Free Route Airspace (FRA) concept and User Preferred Routes (UPR) across the African and Indian Ocean Region, with a particular focus on the Western and Central Africa (WACAF) subregion. It outlines the outcomes of the UPR trial program (November 2023 – May 2025), the decisions of the joint airlines/ANSP workshop held in September 2025, and the path toward full operationalization of UPR from October 30, 2025, in the WACAF region. It further proposes actions to support the transition to cross-border FRA implementation in WACAF and ESAF.</p> <p>Action by the Meeting is provided in paragraph 3.</p>
<p>REFERENCE(S):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Global Air Navigation Plan (GANP): FRTO-B0/1, FRTO-B1/1, FRTO-B1/2 • APIRG Conclusions 22/36; 23/02; 24/14; 25/03; 26/09 and Decisions 26/04; 27/01 • AFI Regional Air Navigation Plan • State AIPs
<p>Related ICAO Strategic Objective(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety • Air Navigation Capacity and Efficiency • Environmental Protection

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Free Route Airspace (FRA) concept enables airline operators to plan and fly their preferred trajectories between designated entry and exit points within specified airspace, without being limited by fixed ATS routes.

1.2 To prepare for the transition to FRA, User Preferred Route (UPR) trials were initiated in November 2023 by AFRAA and CANSO under the coordination of the FRA and UPR project management teams (PMTs), covering eight Flight Information Regions (FIRs) in Western and Central Africa. These trials were based on the successful implementation of FRA and UPR in another ICAO Region, particularly Latin America.

1.3 The primary goal of the trials was to evaluate the feasibility of cross-FIR direct routing, measure operational performance, and develop operational readiness among ANSPs and air operators.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 FRA has been published in six FIRs under ASECNA (Brazzaville, Dakar, N'Djamena, Niamey), GCAA (Accra FIR), and NAMA (Kano FIR). Three other FIRs—Kinshasa, Roberts, and SAL—are preparing publication but have already incorporated Direct Routing (DCT) procedures. The regional approach follows a phased implementation: tactical directs → plannable DCT → local FRA → cross-border FRA.

2.2 The WACAF region trials initially involved five airlines—Ethiopian Airlines, Kenya Airways, Royal Air Maroc, EgyptAir, and RwandAir. This was later expanded to include Asky Airlines. Participating airlines conducted trial cycles of one day, three days, seven days, thirty days, and ninety days, validating operational feasibility and benefits across multiple city pairs. Operational coordination between FIRs was a key enabler of these trials, despite challenges such as limited human resources and a lack of real-time coordination tools.

2.3 A joint UPR/FRA workshop held in Dakar from 22–26 September 2025 brought together ANSPs and air operators. The workshop agreed to end the trial phase and transition to full operational UPR deployment in WACAF, effective October 30, 2025.

2.4 Key workshop outcomes included:

2.4.1 Approval of UPR flight planning and operation for any airline across WACAF airspace.

2.4.2 Initial approval of UPRs covering 30 city pairs.

A commitment by WACAF ANSPs to process any new UPR request within 48 hours, from October 30, 2025, with a complete transition to immediate approval by June 2026.

2.4.3 Targeting ESAF airspace for subsequent UPR trial activities in 2026.

2.5 Estimated annual benefits for six participating airlines:

- i. Flight time saving: Combined 58 days of flight time saved.
- ii. Fuel saving: Combined 5,000 tons of fuel saved
- iii. CO₂ saving: Combined 16,000 tons of CO₂ emissions avoided.
- iv. A combined USD 17 million in fuel cost saved

2.6 Transition from fixed ATS routes to FRA requires:

- i. Alignment of Navigation Specifications across FIRs.
- ii. Publication of FRA points and harmonization of AIP entries.
- iii. Strengthened civil-military coordination to support flexible use of airspace.
- iv. Performance monitoring tools for route usage, distance/time savings, and safety indicators.
- v. Reinforcement of project teams (PMT expansion) to sustain momentum.
- vi. Stakeholders highlighted the importance of securing real-time coordination capability, similar to the CADENA model.

CONCLUSION

2.7 The AFI Region is entering a decisive phase of FRA operationalization, with WACAF setting a precedent for large-scale UPR operations. Regional coordination, harmonization of procedures, and continuous stakeholder engagement are critical to consolidating these gains and ensuring the benefits of FRA—efficiency, safety, and environmental sustainability—are fully realized across the continent. The list of validated UPRs is presented as Appendix 1 to this paper.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to:

- a) Note the progress achieved in the UPR operational deployment in WACAF from October 30, 2025.
- b) Encourage States that have not yet implemented FRA to initiate feasibility studies—particularly on East–West and North–South axes.
- c) Support data collection and performance monitoring to demonstrate benefits and refine procedures.
- d) Call on the harmonization of NAVSPEC across FIRs to enable seamless cross-border operations.
- e) Support the organization of a regional FRA coordination meeting to support cross-border implementation.
- f) Support transition from UPR trials to permanent operations and expansion to other airlines/routes.
- g) Reaffirm the importance of civil-military coordination for optimal airspace use.
