



ICAO

International Civil Aviation Organization

**The Ninth Meeting of the APANPIRG ATM Sub-Group
(ATM/SG/9)**

Video Teleconference, 01 – 05 November 2021

Agenda Item 6: ATM Coordination (Meetings, Route Development, Contingency Planning)

REFRESHER TRAINING TO SUPPORT RESUMPTION OF TRAFFIC DEMAND

(Presented by Singapore)

SUMMARY

The unprecedented disruption in global air travel has been marked by a drastic and sustained drop in air traffic volume, with accompanying cost-cutting measures and capacity reductions across airlines, airports and air navigation service providers alike.

As global air travel gradually recovers, a regional resumption strategy is necessary to manage potential hazards such as capacity imbalances, unusual regional traffic patterns, and human factor issues such as the lack of readiness to cope with post-COVID air traffic volume for returning staff, and having newly trained ATCOs who had only been trained in low volumes of traffic.

This paper shares Singapore's experience in the implementation of continuous and preparatory training for the purpose of enhancing readiness for ATCOs to handle post-COVID traffic surges. Additionally, it proposes for the region to consider sharing their experiences in the management of such emerging operational risks in order to enhance Asia Pacific's collective readiness to tackle challenges that may accompany a resumption to normal traffic levels.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Facing unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to international air travel, ICAO stepped up and coordinated global efforts to address emerging issues and risks. Through the expertise of States, ICAO and the industry, ICAO guidance documents were issued which aim to support recovery and strengthen the industry beyond the COVID pandemic.

1.2 In the Asa-Pacific region, the ICAO APAC COVID-19 Contingency and Recovery Planning Group (ACCRPG) was formed to assist the DGCA's in their efforts in tackling challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3 The eighth meeting of the ICAO APAC Air Traffic Management Sub-Group (ATM/SG/8) reviewed various national measures to address economic issues, operational and public-health risks, and ATM service innovations. The meeting highlighted the importance of developing a resumption strategy based on regional coordination and collaboration

1.4 Drawing reference from *WP24 – Regional ATM Contingency Planning* presented by ICAO Secretariat at ATM/SG/8 (which had highlighted and shared the importance of ATM contingency planning and how it helped to navigate through the various challenges presented, e.g. COVID-19 and the Afghanistan situation), this paper shares Singapore’s experiences in planning for recovery, urges ICAO, States and operators to consider the implementation of a strategy which could help to enhance the region’s readiness for upward trends in traffic pattern by collaboratively identifying emerging operational risks, and incorporating these into new and/or existing refresher trainings.

2. DISCUSSION

Roadmap to OPS Normal

2.1 ICAO has developed a roadmap to OPS normal¹ to gradually withdraw interim alleviations to the Standards of the Annexes that were initially necessary to support continued operations. The roadmap provides states, regulators, and operators with planning tools and approaches that manage the recommencement of operations in line with the requirements of the SARPs.

2.2 A robust safety management system forms the foundation for any operator and air navigation service provider (ANSP). The roadmap to OPS normal includes guidance on addressing potential hazards to assist in managing operational risks. Such analyses are commonly conducted at the local level even though the identified hazards themselves may have a larger regional or global impact. Additionally, these hazards may not be independent of one another. For example, an increase in the number of go-arounds may be related to an increase in wildlife activities, foreign objects and debris (FOD), aircraft-related technical issues, or even confidence level of staff.

ATCO Training – Singapore’s Experience

2.3 Singapore is not spared the disruptions caused by the pandemic. During this period, one of the operational risks we have identified is that ATCOs may gradually become unaccustomed to handling high pre-COVID traffic volumes. Therefore, every effort is made to retain the momentum for training, licensing, and recency requirements for ATCOs.

2.4 Enhanced readiness for ATCOs is achieved through a tailored continuous training programme, which ATCOs have to undergo in addition to their daily rostered duties. For ATC training, over and above on-job-training in live environment, the tailored continuous training programme also augments the development and assessment of competencies during training. Overall, the tailored continuous training programme complements live air traffic control in providing assurance that newly rated ATCOs are trained to the competency standard based on an established traffic matrix required for pre-COVID traffic patterns. The assessments and traffic matrix criteria ensures trainee’s formative assessments are made in an acceptable traffic complexity and volume.

2.5 While this initial, intensive programme had been in place since June 2020 in anticipation that the COVID impact to traffic demand would be short-term, it was reviewed and subsequently replaced with a “Training for Peak” programme in May 2021 which considers a more realistic traffic projections drawn based on the now-known nature of the coronavirus. This also avoids overtraining and the associated human factor issues such as training fatigue or complacency.

¹ <https://www.icao.int/safety/OPS/OPS-Normal/Pages/default.aspx>

2.6 Taking into consideration workforce availability and the need for workplace distancing measures, the revised training programme reduces the resource requirements needed and mitigates associated risks through (i) regular monitoring and forecasts of air traffic, and (ii) the implementation of a “Pre-emptive Ramp Up Programme (‘PRUP’)”. Based on the ongoing trends, as traffic is expected to pick up sporadically / unevenly over a period of time, but reach and exceed pre-COVID levels in time, there could be situations where ATCOs are required to manage high traffic levels in short notice. The PRUP programme ensures that, as part of the safety assurance measures, traffic growth trends are closely monitored, together with operational feedback of ATCOs. In the event we project that there would be a sustained surge of air traffic which ATCOs (particularly the newly rated ones) could find challenging, additional training will be provided.

2.7 In addition to the PRUP programme, Singapore has also adopted mitigation measures which includes open and on-going dialogues with ATCOs on perceived training needs and mental well-being, building team competencies, classroom trainings and promoting just culture and the use of case-studies to raise awareness and confidence. The operational units and training academy would work together to incorporate emerging training needs into new or existing refresher trainings. These would all help to ensure that ATCOs are competent and confident in their competency in managing the traffic levels at all times.

Broadening the Regional Resumption Strategy

2.8 The Asia-Pacific Regional Strategy for COVID-19 related ATM Contingency Recovery is a welcomed strategy that addresses hazards associated with capacity imbalances. Through regular updating and sharing of traffic demand and readiness of the ATM system, Member States and operators will be able to make steady progress towards OPS normal.

2.9 In the foregoing, Singapore has shared our experiences in readying ATCOs in the event of a sustained post-pandemic surge in air traffic growth. However, this is only one of potentially many challenges. Some of the future challenges could be new and unanticipated. Singapore sees the need for the region as a whole to collaboratively share emerging risks may be identified, with a view to enhancing our collective readiness to emerge stronger from the pandemic together.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to:

- a) Note Singapore’s experience on the implementation of continual and preparatory training programmes to enhance ATCOs’ readiness for post-COVID traffic surges and other emerging operational risks;
- b) consider sharing of State’s/Administration’s experience in mitigating any emerging risk either through the *APAC COVID-19 ATM Contingency Recovery Strategy, Appendix B: Checklist: Asia/Pacific COVID-19 Contingency Operations and Recovery*, or other platform as appropriate; and
- c) discuss any relevant matters as appropriate.

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