International Civil Aviation Organization

Twelfth Meeting of the Asia/Pacific Air Traffic Flow Management Steering Group (ATFM/SG/12)

Video Teleconference, 13 – 16 September 2022

Agenda Item 4: Review of Current CDM/ATFM Operations and Problem Areas

BOBCAT OPERATIONAL UPDATES

(Presented by Thailand)

SUMMARY

This paper continues the convention of sharing operational updates from BOBCAT ATFM system, normally imposed on nighttime westbound flights through Kabul FIR. Due to the uncertainty of ATS provision in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of the U.S. troops in August 2021, however, BOBCAT operation has been suspended henceforth. In lieu of the usual flight and ATFM measure analysis, this paper discusses Thailand's readiness to continue supporting the operation when ATS provision is reinstated and clarifies the system's ability to deliver CTOT information via AFTN/AMHS as requested during the previous ATFM/SG/11.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The meeting would recall that on AIRAC 5 July 2007, international long-range cross-border ATFM procedure using the BOBCAT system became fully operational. Henceforth, the operation has been a routine service provided by Bangkok ATFM Unit (Bangkok ATFMU) for all westbound flights from South and Southeast Asia overflying the Afghanistan airspace (Kabul FIR) between 2000 – 2359 UTC each night.

1.2 In August 2021, however, the enroute ATS provision for overflight traffic in Afghanistan was suspended following the withdrawal of troops and personnel of the U.S. and foreign governments from the country. The suspension of the ATS provision required the Kabul FIR Contingency Coordination Team (Kabul FIR CCT) to be activated, with no certainty on when the resumption of the service could be expected. Consequently, airspace users began to route away from Kabul FIR for the Europe/South/Southeast Asia flights. The number of Europe-bound flights requesting ATFM slots from the BOBCAT system dwindled in the first half of August 2021 before falling to zero starting 16 August 2021.

1.3 With the airspace users choosing to avoid Kabul FIR and the overflight ATS provision suspended and in coordination with ICAO Asia/Pacific Regional Office and IATA Asia-Pacific Regional Office, Bangkok ATFMU (AEROTHAI) decided to temporarily suspend the provision of BOBCAT ATFM service starting in September 2021 until it is once again required, either through establishment of a contingency arrangement for overflight through the Kabul FIR or through establishment of enroute ATS for the Kabul FIR. Bangkok ATFMU's operating hours were also reduced to 2330 – 1430 UTC (0630 – 2130 Local Time).

1.4 Therefore, this WP discusses – in lieu of the usual post-operation analysis – the

readiness to resume service and the clarification on BOBCAT system's ability to deliver BOBCAT ATFM slot information via AFTN/AMHS messages as requested during the previous meeting.

2. DISCUSSION

Readiness to Resume Service

2.1 Since the suspension of the BOBCAT ATFM service in September 2021, the BOBCAT ATFM system has not been "shutdown". While the system is not monitored by Bangkok ATFMU staff, regular preventive maintenance by the engineering support team is still conducted per normal procedure. The system, therefore, is ready to be used when the service is once again required.

2.2 On the other hand, Bangkok ATFMU has reduced its operating hours to 2330 – 1430 UTC (0630 – 2130 LCL) instead of the usual H24 following the decision to temporarily suspend BOBCAT ATFM service provision. The unit still retains all existing staff members, though, and will also be able to reinstate H24 service when it is once again required.

2.3 Throughout the period between August 2021 and now, Thailand representatives have been present at all Kabul FIR Contingency Coordination Team (Kabul CCT) meetings and have been kept up to date as an ATFM service provider for the area.

2.4 The decision to temporarily suspend the service was primarily based on the absence of enroute ATS for the Kabul FIR. Once the condition over the airspace is improved and flights return to the area once again, Thailand remains committed to providing the BOBCAT ATFM service if it continues to be required.

Delivery of BOBCAT Slot Information via AFTN/AMHS

2.5 During the BOBCAT ATFM discussion at the previous ATFM/SG meeting (ATFM/SG/11, August 2021), a query was raised on whether the BOBCAT ATFM system can deliver CTOT information using the Slot Allocation Message (SAM) and other related messages via AFTN/AMHS based on the *Asia/Pacific AFTN/AMHS-Based Interface Control Document for ATFM, v2.0* ("the ATFM ICD").

2.6 In responding to the query, the following technical factors were considered:

(1) Currently, the BOBCAT system does deliver information using SAM, SRM, and SLC for flights whose flight plans are received by AEROTHAI Flight Data Management Center (FDMC)'s system, i.e., flights that either operate from airports in Thailand or overfly a portion of Bangkok FIR. For those flights, the system will send SAM and other associated messages only after their flight plans have been received by the FDMC, even though BOBCAT slot allocation process will have been completed prior to flight plan submission per the current procedure. This is because one of the required fields in SAM/SRM/SLC as per the ATFM ICD is the Estimated Off-Block Time (EOBT), which is defined by the PANS-ATM (Doc 4444) as a time of departure movement commencement to be included in Item 13 of a basic flight plan.

(2) As the BOBCAT system and procedure had been developed prior to the existence of the ATFM ICD, the capability to deliver SAM/SRM/SLC as described above had only recently been added. The capability relies on a separate ATFM system which generates and delivers the messages based on the flight plans received by AEROTHAI FDMC.

(3) It is noted that, as per AIP Thailand section ENR1.9 paragraph 2.6.4, flight plans for flights associated with the BOBCAT procedure are required to be sent to the Bangkok ATFMU AFTN address (VTBBZDZX) as well. However, such flight plans for flights not relating to Bangkok FIR will not be received by AEROTHAI FDMC and thus have not been used to generate and deliver SAM/SRM/SLC for BOBCAT slots.

2.7 Therefore, to enable the BOBCAT system to also construct and distribute SAM, SRM, and SLC for flights that neither originate from airports in Thailand nor overfly Bangkok FIR, considerable adjustments will have to be made to the BOBCAT system and/or the separate ATFM system responsible for generating and distributing the messages to enable them to perform the function even when the flight plans are not received by AEROTHAI FDMC.

2.8 To ascertain whether the system adjustment is a worthwhile endeavor, Thailand would like to seek inputs from other States/Administrations and stakeholders – particularly the airspace users – on the usefulness of having BOBCAT slots be delivered via AFTN/AMHS in addition to the existing web page.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to

a) note the information contained in this paper,

b) discuss the latest situation over the Afghanistan airspace,

c) discuss the necessity of BOBCAT slot delivery via AFTN/AMHS using SAM/SRM/SLC per the ATFM ICD, and

d) discuss any relevant matters as appropriate.

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