



ICAO

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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

### Lead Time of Flight Plan Filing to Enhance Demand Predictability

(Presented by Hong Kong China)

#### SUMMARY

This paper highlights the importance of operators filing flight plan with sufficient lead time to enhance demand predictability, which in turn minimizes the chance of initiating unnecessary ATFM measures and delay. Even if an ATFM measure is initiated, an equitable delay is distributed among all affected flights. This paper then proposes to align the lead time of filing flight plan in the APAC region to at least 3 hours before the EOBT.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Although traffic volume in the Asia Pacific (APAC) Region is still relatively low during the traffic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, there are still some occasions in the Region when operational constraints cause the capacity of airport or airspace to drop below the traffic demand and Air Traffic Flow Management (ATFM) measures have to be implemented for Demand Capacity Balancing (DCB).
- 1.2 From regular Post-Operations Analysis (POA), flight plan filing time has been identified as a major contributor to unreliable demand picture. Flight plans of some flights were often filed with lead time less than the required standard which did not only paint a false traffic demand at a particular aerodrome or airspace, but also introduced complications when ATFM measures were to be initiated. In extreme circumstances, it may trigger unnecessary ATFM measures cause disruption to ATC operations and lengthy delay to traffic.

## 2. DISCUSSION

- 2.1 From January to July 2022, twelve Ground Delay Programme (GDP) operational trials and one Airspace Flow Programme (AFP) were initiated by Hong Kong China. Approximately 200 flights were subjected to the GDP trials and **more than 10%** of the flight in the GDP were found to have filed their flight plan *less than 3 hours* prior to the estimated off-block time (EOBT) against the requirement stipulated in the Hong Kong AIP.

- 2.2 Cross-border ATFM, being an inclusive process, requires the participation of all stakeholders for enhancing the equitability and effectiveness of the whole system. With a high participation rate, all stakeholders will benefit when ATFM measures are applied.
- 2.3 The benefits of effective ATFM rely on timely sharing of information between all partners to improve efficiency and operational decision making. HK AIP ENR 1.10 Para. 4.2 states that aircraft operating to or from Hong Kong should submit a flight plan at least 3 hours (and in no case later than 60 minutes) prior to the estimated off-block time (EOBT). It is crucial for operators to file flight plans with sufficient lead time in order to realistically reflect the upcoming traffic demand picture to Air Traffic Flow Management Units (ATFMU) so that the ATFMU may plan ahead and initiate appropriate ATFM measures as required.
- 2.4 When GDP is initiated at the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA), the landing slots (i.e. CLDT – Calculated Landing Time) are assigned 1.5-2 hours prior to EOBT based on the ELDT (Estimated Landing Time) from the FPL on "first come, first served" principle. Unnecessary delay may be imposed to flights with FPL filed less than 1.5 hours prior to EOBT as most of slots would have been assigned and the subject flight may be put to the end of the queue.
- 2.5 For the case of AFP, the room for re-sequencing aircraft in the air is much less than that of the arrival GDP. As a result, the success of AFP relies largely on the Estimated Time Over (ETO) of a waypoint or an airspace derived from the flight plans filed by the flight operators.
- 2.6 Therefore, it is proposed to align the lead time for the filing of a flight plan in the APAC region to at least 3 hours before the EOBT of each flight, not only to standardize the practice but to contribute to a more efficient ATFM network across the APAC Region to get well prepared for air traffic recovery and future growth. In fact, similar flight planning requirement has been adopted by EuroControl across many parts of the EUR region, which requires flight plans to be submitted to the Integrated Initial Flight Planning System (IFPS) for processing at least 3 hours before the EOBT where possible.
- 2.7 Such standardized requirement would also serve as an essential guideline and best industry practice for States which do not have an established ATFM unit when they wish to implement ATFM measures in the future.

### **3. ACTION BY THE MEETING**

- 3.1 The meeting is invited to:
- a) note the information contained in this paper;
  - b) realize the importance of filing flight plan with sufficient lead time and adverse impact to ATC operation for the APAC Region;
  - c) align the lead time of filing flight plan in the APAC region to at least 3 hours before the EOBT; and
  - d) discuss any relevant matters as appropriate.

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