



International Civil Aviation Organization

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Thirteenth Meeting of the Asia/Pacific Air Traffic Flow Management Steering Group (ATFM/SG/13)

Bangkok, Thailand, 03 – 07 April 2023

Agenda Item 4: Review of Current 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 for all westbound flights from South and Southeast Asia overflying the Afghanistan airspace (Kabul FIR) between 2000 – 2359 UTC.

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 avoiding Kabul FIR and the uncertainties of overflight ATS provision in the airspace, and in coordination with ICAO Asia/Pacific Regional Office and IATA Asia-Pacific Regional Office, Bangkok ATFM Unit suspended the BOBCAT ATFM service starting in September 2021 until it is once again required by the traffic volume through the FIR. Bangkok ATFM Unit's operating hours were also reduced to 2330 – 1430 UTC (0630 – 2130 Local Time).

1.4 This WP discusses – in lieu of the usual post-operation analysis – the readiness to resume service and the update on BOBCAT system's ability to deliver BOBCAT ATFM slot information via AFTN/AMHS messages as preliminarily discussed during the previous meeting.

2. DISCUSSION

Readiness to Resume Service

2.1 As was reported during the 12th ATFM Steering Group Meeting (ATFM/SG/12, September 2022), while the BOBCAT ATFM service is currently suspended and the Bangkok ATFM Unit operating hours are reduced, the system continues to be maintained by Thailand and the service can be resumed when traffic demand over Kabul FIR once again exceeds the airspace’s capacity.

2.2 It is understood that the process to reinstate enroute air traffic services over the airspace is being discussed among relevant authorities. Thailand will continue to follow this development and will prepare a resumption of the BOBCAT ATFM service when necessary.

Delivery of BOBCAT Slot Information via AFTN/AMHS

2.3 During the discussion at the previous meeting (ATFM/SG/12, September 2022), Thailand initiated a discussion – in response to an earlier query raised in 2021 – on the BOBCAT ATFM system’s capability to deliver CTOT information using Slot Allocation Message (SAM) and other related messages (SRM¹, SLC²) via AFTN/AMHS based on the *Asia/Pacific AFTN/AMHS-Based Interface Control Document for ATFM, v2.0* (“the ATFM ICD”). During that discussion, Thailand shared that (a) the system is already sending SAMs for flights originating from or overflying Thailand, and (b) a system change will be required to do the same thing for flights not operating via Thailand’s airspace and thus whose flight plans would normally not be processed by AEROTHAI’s *Flight Data Management Center* (FDMC).

2.4 From the discussion, Thailand recognized that – while the capability was not immediately requested by the airspace users and most States that have to facilitate compliance with BOBCAT CTOTs – the capability will be useful when States wish to have a more automated processing of the information such as when the BOBCAT CTOT information has to be integrated into the ATM system and the A-CDM system and process. Such integrated and automated processing of the information may assist departure ATC units in better facilitating compliance to the CTOTs.

2.5 Thailand has therefore conducted internal analysis and is pleased to inform the meeting that the capability to deliver BOBCAT CTOTs via AFTN/AMHS using SAM/SRM/SLC can be developed for the BOBCAT ATFM system. It is expected that the capability can be delivered within 2023, albeit system tests will be required. Therefore, during the development in the second half of 2023, Thailand may engage with some States able to process SAM/SRM/SLC for ATFM’s purpose to conduct system tests.

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) support Thailand with BOBCAT ATFM message delivery tests when requested, and
- d) discuss any relevant matters as appropriate.

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¹ Slot Revision Message

² Slot Cancellation Message