



ICAO

International Civil Aviation Organization

**Fourteenth Meeting of the Asia/Pacific Air Traffic Flow
Management Steering Group (ATFM/SG/14)**

Bangkok, Thailand, 22 – 26 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 absence of ATS provision in Afghanistan and temporary suspension of BOBCAT service since August 2021, however, this paper discusses the estimated lead time necessary should the BOBCAT service resumption be required. The paper also provides update on the development of the BOBCAT system's ability to deliver CTOT information via AFTN/AMHS as alluded to during the previous AFTM/SG/13.

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 absence 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 and remains suspended until today. The service will be considered for resumption when it is once again required by the level of traffic demand through the FIR.

1.4 This WP discusses – in lieu of the usual post-operation analysis – the estimated lead time necessary should the BOBCAT service resumption be required by Thailand, and the update on developing BOBCAT system's ability to deliver BOBCAT ATFM slot information via AFTN/AMHS messages as discussed during the previous meeting.

2. DISCUSSION

Estimated Lead Time Required 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, the system continues to be maintained by Thailand and the service can be resumed when traffic demand over Kabul FIR is at the level that the service is required once again.

2.2 To resume the service, however, several important preparatory actions are required, including:

- Pre-activation maintenance of the BOBCAT system to ensure the same level of service availability as compared to before the suspension,
- Adjustment of Bangkok ATFM Unit’s manpower and rostering to resume the added nighttime workload,
- Training or re-training of Bangkok ATFM Unit’s personnel,
- Training or re-training of personnel at other ATFM and ATS units that must interact with the BOBCAT system and service,
- Training or re-training of airspace users, and
- Publication of AIP/AIP Supplement or other forms of notification at least 2 AIRAC cycles (56 days) prior to the resumption of service.

2.3 Based on the preparatory actions list, Thailand estimates that the lead time necessary for the resumption of BOBCAT service should be 3 – 4 months from the time it is determined that the BOBCAT service should be resumed.

2.4 It is understood that the process to reinstate enroute air traffic services over the Afghanistan 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

2.5 During the discussion at the ATFM/SG/12 (September 2022), Thailand had 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).

2.6 During the subsequent discussion at the ATFM/SG/13 (April 2023), Thailand informed that – in recognition of the usefulness of the SAM/SRM/SLC capability especially in allowing BOBCAT CTOT information to be integrated the ATM automation and A-CDM system and process, the BOBCAT system would be upgraded to enable BOBCAT CTOT delivery via AFTN/AMHS for all flights regardless of whether AEROTHAI’s FDMC would have received the flight plans.

¹ Slot Revision Message

² Slot Cancellation Message

2.7 Thailand is pleased to inform that the development has been completed, and the function is now included in the BOBCAT system. The BOBCAT system will now issue CTOTs via AFTN/AMHS using SAM/SRM/SLC for all flights when:

- (a) the system has received the flight plan, which would be the case for flights transiting the Bangkok FIR, or
- (b) the timestamp has reached 90 minutes before the flight's EOBT as submitted to the system regardless of whether the flight plan has been received, which would address the issue of flights not passing through the Bangkok FIR.

2.8 Thailand hopes that the added capability will enable States/Administrations to better facilitate compliance to BOBCAT CTOTs when the BOBCAT service is resumed.

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 process to resume the BOBCAT service,
- d) note the BOBCAT ATFM system's added capability of CTOT delivery via AFTN/AMHS, and
- e) discuss any relevant matters as appropriate.

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