



International Civil Aviation Organization
ICAO **Sixth Meeting of the Bay of Bengal Traffic Flow Review Group (BOBTFRG/6)**

Bangkok, Thailand, 14 – 16 November 2024

Agenda Item 6: Decisions/Recommendations to SAIOSEACG

REACTIVATION OF BOBCAT ATFM PROCEDURE

(Presented by IATA)

SUMMARY

This paper provides summary of the need for reactivating the Bay of Bengal Cooperative Air Traffic Flow Management System (BOBCAT) ATFM procedure and the steps required to achieve it.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The meeting would recall that on AIRAC 5 July 2007, international long-range cross-border ATFM procedure using the Bay of Bengal Cooperative Air Traffic Flow Management System (BOBCAT) became fully operational. Henceforth, the operation has been a routine service provided by Bangkok ATFM Unit for all westbound flights operating westbound through the Afghanistan airspace (Kabul FIR) between 2000-2359UTC.

1.2 The BOBCAT ATFM procedure allocates entry time slots into the Kabul FIR, reflected into Calculated Take-Off Time (CTOT) from associated departure aerodromes, and advises the aircraft of those slot times prior to departure.

1.3 The ATFM procedure was temporarily suspended following suspension of en-route ATS provision in the Afghanistan airspace in August 2021. However, as traffic levels have returned, there is a need to prepare mitigation for the growing congestion of flights electing to transit the Kabul FIR contingency volume.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Kabul FIR has been without Air Traffic Services (ATS) since August 2021. Air traffic numbers have been recovering in the region post the COVID-19 pandemic, and until recently most airlines transiting between Asia and Europe have been electing to flight plan and fly around Kabul FIR.

2.2 With the situation in Afghanistan stabilizing in recent months, and with other geopolitical events occurring in the Middle-East region, more airlines are now electing to use TIBA procedures and follow the contingency instructions for transit through Kabul FIR.

2.3 With the increasing demand there is growing congestion in the FIRs neighbouring Kabul FIR and even in the volumes adjacent to them. Several mitigation strategies have been discussed by

affected stakeholders including making more and lower flight levels available for planning, reducing the longitudinal spacing into the Kabul FIR, and reactivation of BOBCAT.

2.4 Reactivation of the BOBCAT ATFM procedure has been discussed between IATA and Thailand, and based on current and expected future traffic numbers, and aircraft operators and States/Administrations feedback, it has been determined that there is merit in a proposal to commence the steps to do so. It is expected to take three to four months, according to information Thailand presented in WP/07 submitted to ICAO ATFM/SG/14 (April 2024), for all stakeholders to be prepared. Accordingly, the AIRAC dates in February or March 2025 are being considered.

2.5 As well as some refresher training for participating ATCs and aircraft operations personnel (flight planning, dispatch, pilots), relevant States/Administrations AIPs will need to be reviewed and where required, updated to reflect any amendments to the BOBCAT ATFM procedure. This would include caveat that BOBCAT is an ATFM procedure for alleviating traffic congestion, reducing airborne holding where possible, and in no way is to be assumed as a separation authority either in the Afghanistan airspace or in any other FIR.

2.6 Procedures will need to be amended to reflect that the BOBCAT system is now able to distribute CTOT via AFTN/MHS (as presented to ICAO ATFM/SG/14 in WP/07).

2.7 As the BOBCAT ATFM procedure relies on facilitating compliance to CTOT distributed, States/Administrations are reminded of expectations laid out in para 7.32 of ICAO Asia/Pacific Regional Framework for Collaborative ATFM, that “all States should ensure that ATC procedures and, where available, CDM processes facilitating compliance with received CTOT are implemented.” It is expected that States/Administrations with existing procedures for facilitating compliance with received CTOT from other ATFM procedure may require less ATCO training.

2.8 Affected States/Administrations and aircraft operators are requested to commence reviewing their documentation and internal capability to participate in the BOBCAT ATFM procedure with a view to be ready to commence as early as 20 February 2025 unless advised later AIRAC date.

2.9 Parties will need to reconfirm their accounts with Thailand to ensure correct access is granted and available for the necessary personnel.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to:

- a) note the information contained in this paper; and
- b) begin review and preparation for reactivation of BOBCAT ATFM procedure.

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