



ICAO

International Civil Aviation Organization

Fifteenth Meeting of the Asia/Pacific Air Traffic Flow Management Steering Group (ATFM/SG/15)

Bangkok, Thailand, 28 April – 02 May 2025

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

REACTIVATION OF BOBCAT RELATED TO KABUL CONTINGENCY

(Presented by IATA)

SUMMARY

This paper presents summary of a side-meeting held at SAIOSEACG4 meeting, and subsequent current and planned actions to reactivate the AEROTHAI administered Bay of Bengal Cooperative Air Traffic Flow Management System (BOBCAT), in order to relieve growing congestion in airspace volumes managing traffic to be metered through the Kabul FIR contingency volume in the absence of ATS in that FIR.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 A small group was convened to discuss a way forward for Kabul Flight Information Region (FIR) Contingency Coordination Team (CCT) meeting to obtain agreement for new contingency conditions and reactivation of BOBCAT based on existing conditions with a plan to transition towards new conditions, as soon as they are agreed.

1.2 To that end, a side meeting on Afghanistan Contingency Operations was convened during the SAIOSEACG4 meeting on Wednesday, 19 March 2025 at 10:00 Bangkok time, at the ICAO APAC Regional Office Conference building. The meeting was attended by nine participants, representing Pakistan, Thailand, IATA, and ICAO.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 During the side meeting, ICAO APAC expressed its appreciation to Pakistan and the stakeholders for their efforts in ensuring appropriate ATC separation and maintaining safety in response to the Kabul FIR contingency situation.

2.2 The key objectives of the meeting were to discuss necessary steps to:

- a) Open up access to lower flight levels on ATS routes N644, L750, P628, and UL333
- b) Reduce the longitudinal spacing from 15 minutes to 10 minutes for RNP2 and RNP4 compliant aircraft entering the volume at same flight level.

2.3 A similar side-meeting had been held at ICAO ATM/SG/12 meeting in September 2024 but none of the planned steps to progress from that meeting had been achieved due limitations in communications with ACAA and States neighbouring the west of Kabul FIR.

2.4 The 19 March 2025 agreed outcomes and way forward as follows:

- a) ICAO APAC to issue invitations as soon as possible to all relevant States for a virtual CCT meeting to take place in the week of 14-18 April 2025 (post meeting discussion is that preference by some is 15 April). The CCT meeting has now been scheduled for 23 April 2025.
- b) ICAO APAC to request their EUR/NAT and MID Regional Offices colleagues reach out to States in their region to ensure participation in the CCT.
- c) IATA member airline KLM contacted Uzbekistan ANSP and received confirmation of a direct contact there for the purposes of 2.4.2 above. That contact was also proposed for assisting with communications with Turkmenistan.
- d) It was agreed that AEROTHAI will commence their internal process of approval to reactivate BOBCAT based on summary of discussions published by ICAO. That will have them prepared to commence re-activation steps from sometime in April / May 2025.
- e) AEROTHAI will communicate with affected States' air navigation service providers (ANSPs) regarding the re-activation of BOBCAT to ensure preparedness, including the necessary procedures in Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP).
- f) Initial reactivation work will use current published contingency procedures and restrictions. The objective from the discussions is that it will be ready to evolve when agreement on new conditions is reached with the States neighbouring Kabul.
- g) BOBCAT will be initially programmed for 15+0 minute spacing to meet the current contingency spacing requirement and then re-programmed to 10+5 minutes if and when the reduction is agreed after safety considerations.
- h) Due the extended period that BOBCAT has been deactivated it is expected that refresher or new training will require longer than originally anticipated. As activities are now commencing, a firm time estimate time can soon be assessed and date set for reactivation.
- i) ICAO APAC held a meeting with ACAA on 24 March 2025 and obtained confirmation from Afghanistan of their acceptance of BOBCAT being operated again for flights transiting their FIR.
- j) IATA has briefed airlines in the Regional Coordination Group (RCG) and also notified other participating airlines to begin preparing for participation in BOBCAT, and to also prepare based on current contingency procedures and restrictions, but to be ready to quickly move to new conditions.
- k) IATA has communicated to members the need to request higher levels (FL400) whenever able as this creates immediate relief to the congestion in aircraft delayed into the volume.
- l) IATA has also communicated ANSP request for airlines to plan via BIROS whenever able to relieve congestion at DOBAT, however it was agreed that flight planning restrictions and onward clearances make that difficult.

m) It is noted that BOBCAT would assist in distributing traffic demand entering Afghanistan airspace among various entry points (e.g. BIROS, DOBAT) as well as various FLs (FL360, FL380, FL400).

2.5 To conclude the session, ICAO APAC reaffirmed its commitment to continuous efforts to improve the situation, including reducing the ATC workload of neighbouring FIRs, and expressed appreciation for the additional efforts made by those FIRs.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The meeting is invited to:

- a) note the information contained in this paper; and
- b) discuss any relevant matters as appropriate.

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