International Civil Aviation Organization

Sixteenth Meeting of the Asia/Pacific Air Traffic Flow Management and Airport Collaborative Decision-Making Steering Group (ATFM & A-CDM/SG/16)

Bangkok, Thailand, 06 – 10 April 2026

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

IMPACT OF INCREASED BOBCAT TRAFFIC THROUGH PAKISTAN

(Presented by Pakistan)

SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper is to present an operational analysis and overview of westbound flights through the Pakistan Airspace (Lahore FIR) associated with the BOBCAT system for the seven month period between September 2025 to March 2026. This paper will highlight the issues being faced by Pakistan in handling BOBCAT Traffic and the proposed remedial measures.

This paper will also look at the impact of Middle East Conflict on the traffic trend within the region.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Afghanistan suspended Air Traffic Services within Kabul FIR with effect from 16th August, 2021. Consequently BOBCAT was also suspended from August, 2021.

1.2 Kabul FIR was declared as uncontrolled airspace, however, Contingency Routes remained available. Initially airlines avoided transiting through Afghanistan Airspace, however, in the wake of geopolitical developments within the region, airlines began to use Afghanistan Airspace in the later half of 2023. After April 2024, air traffic steadily began to rise on these major trunk routes, especially during night hours.

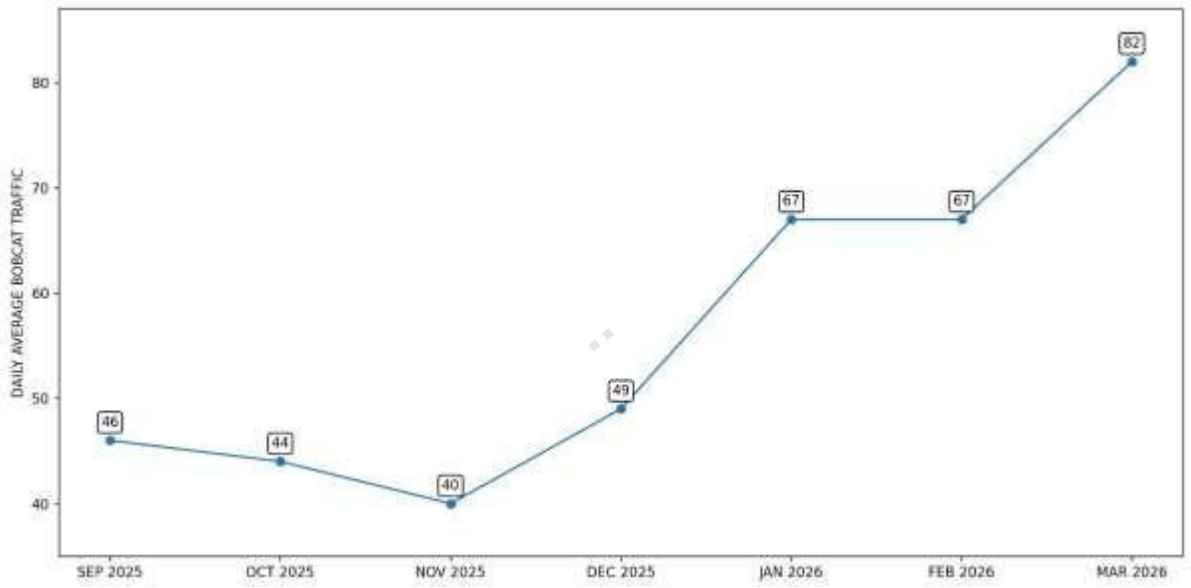
1.3 With the increase in Westbound traffic, the need was felt to streamline the procedures for air traffic flow management within Afghanistan. This issue was raised by Pakistan in the 4th Meeting of SAIOSEACG Forum, held from 18th to 21st March, 2025 at ICAO APAC (Asia Pacific) Office in Bangkok, Thailand.

1.4 Subsequently, as a result of collaborated efforts by States and with the support of ICAO APAC Office, IATA and AeroThai, BOBCAT system was reactivated with effect from 04th September, 2025.

1.5 This paper aims to highlight the current issues being faced in the smooth implementation of BOBCAT system and the impact of the Middle East Conflict on traffic flow.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The following chart shows the average daily BOBCAT traffic for a seven month period from September, 2025 till March, 2026:



2.2 As is clearly evident from chart depicted above, the average daily BOBCAT traffic has almost doubled over this seven month period. One of the key factors leading to this rise in BOBCAT traffic is the geopolitical instability within the Middle East. Airlines are increasingly utilizing Afghanistan Airspace (KABUL FIR) to connect Far East with Central Asia, Europe and beyond.

2.3 Pakistan being the gateway for WESTBOUND traffic entering KABUL FIR, air traffic controllers at Lahore ACC have to ensure compliance with the ATM Contingency Procedures applicable within KABUL FIR (15 minutes longitudinal separation at same flight level). Resumption of BOBCAT system has proven to be a crucial aid in managing traffic flow entering KABUL FIR, especially during the busy night hours, however, there is still room for improvement.

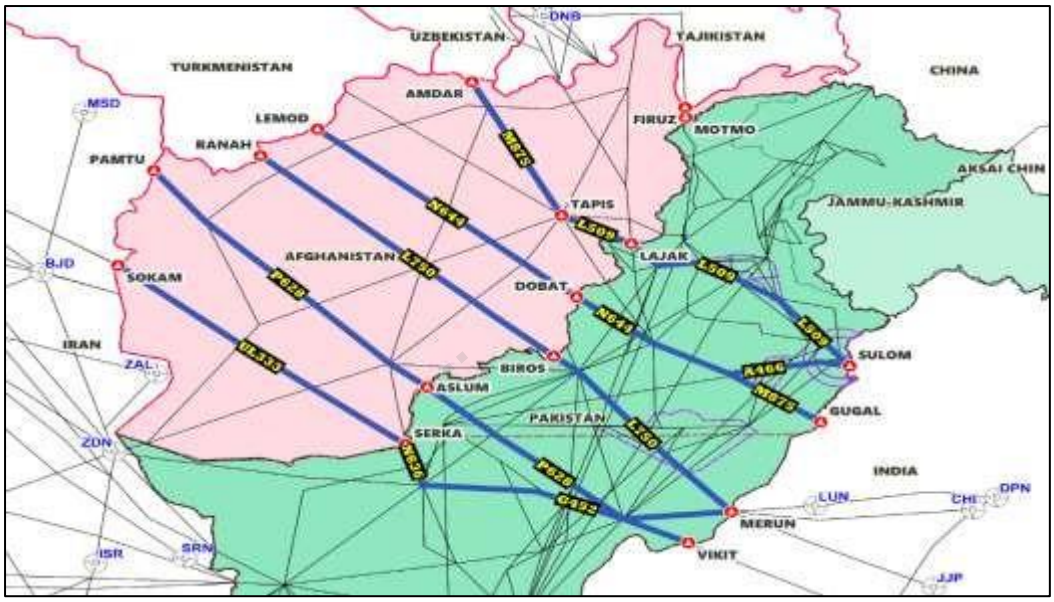
2.4 The following operational analysis is appended below for information please:

2.4.1 The current BOBCAT concept of operation is summarized in table below:

	BOBCAT Concept of Operation		
Applicable Routes	**Applicable Waypoints**	**Available flight Levels**	**Spacing Requirement (Separation + Buffer)**
L509 – M875 / M881	LAJAK	FL 300 - 510	**15+0 MINUTES**
N644	DOBAT	FL 320 - 510	**15+0 MINUTES**
L750	BIROS	FL 320 - 510	**15+0 MINUTES**
P628	ASLUM*	FL 320 - 510	**15+0 MINUTES**
UL333	SERKA*	FL 320 - 510	**15+0 MINUTES**

2.4.2 The TCPs highlighted in RED are effectively unusable as they lead into Iran Airspace.

2.4.3 ***Therefore, Pakistan is accepting traffic at 4 TCPs (SULOM, GUGAL, MERUN & VIKIT) from India and directing that traffic to merge over 3 TCPs (LAJAK, DOBAT & BIROS) before they enter KABUL FIR. This creates a bottleneck which controllers at Lahore ACC have to deal with on a daily basis.***



2.4.4 The BOBCAT is currently using a spacing (separation + buffer) of 15 + 0 Minutes while allocating CTOT to departures. As there is ZERO buffer, flights should ideally meet the exact CTO KABUL FIR TCPs in order to eliminate ATC intervention, however, that is highly implausible.

2.4.5 ***Therefore, flights at same level frequently require ATC intervention to fulfill the requirement of 15 minutes longitudinal separation over KABUL FIR TCPs. On average 1 out of every 3 flights (33 %) has to absorb an average delay of 2 to 5 minutes and around 1 out of 10 flights (10%) has to absorb an average delay of 6 to 12 minutes in order to meet the longitudinal separation requirements. This is in turn accomplished through speed control, Radar vectoring and enroute holding.***

2.4.6 ***Another key factor to highlight is that around 10 % of traffic utilizing these routes do not participate in BOBCAT system. These flights create an additional strain on ATC as they need to be adjusted in between BOBCAT flights.***

2.4.7 ***As per existing LoA between Lahore and Delhi ACCs, the acceptable longitudinal spacing at same flight level is 50 NM (approximately 07 minutes). During BOBCAT hours, most of the traffic usually enters Pakistan airspace at a longitudinal spacing of approximately 8 to 12 minutes at same flight level. This again has to be adjusted by Lahore ACC in line with KABUL FIR ATM Contingency procedures.***

2.4.8 ***In addition to the above, it must be highlighted that Radar vectoring and enroute holding amidst busy airspace (crossing routes) also creates a flight safety hazard.***

2.4.9 The above factors result in the following detrimental impacts on air traffic:

a) Increased ATC Workload

b) Flight Safety Hazards posed by holding aircraft

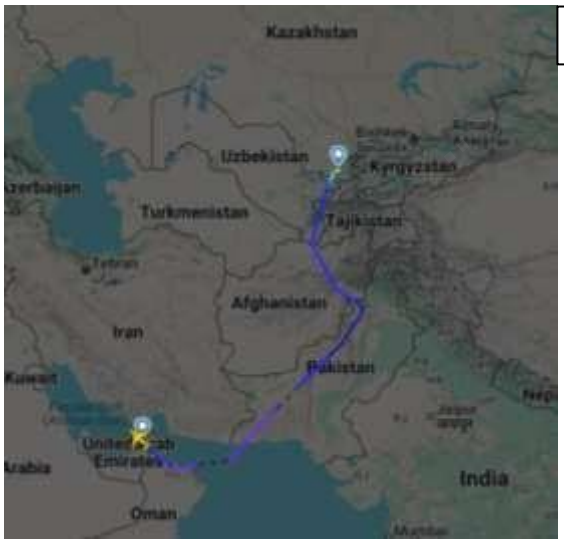
c) Excessive flight delays

d) Extra fuel consumption

e) Increased carbon emissions

2.4.10 In addition to the above, additional flights from Middle eastern Airports have started utilizing KABUL FIR through Pakistan Airspace. These flights constitute around 20 movements per day and do not participate in the BOBCAT system. Examples are shown in figures below:

SECTOR: DUBAI - TASHKENT



SECTOR: DUBAI - ASHGABAT

2.4.11 Due to the aforementioned factors the traffic passing through KABUL FIR has now risen manifold throughout the day.

2.5 In order to alleviate the aforementioned situation, the following is proposed:

2.5.1 Longitudinal spacing over KABUL FIR TCPs may be reduced from 15 minutes to 10 minutes at same flight level using Mach number technique, in accordance with provisions contained in Asia/Pacific Region ATM Contingency Plan, which states:

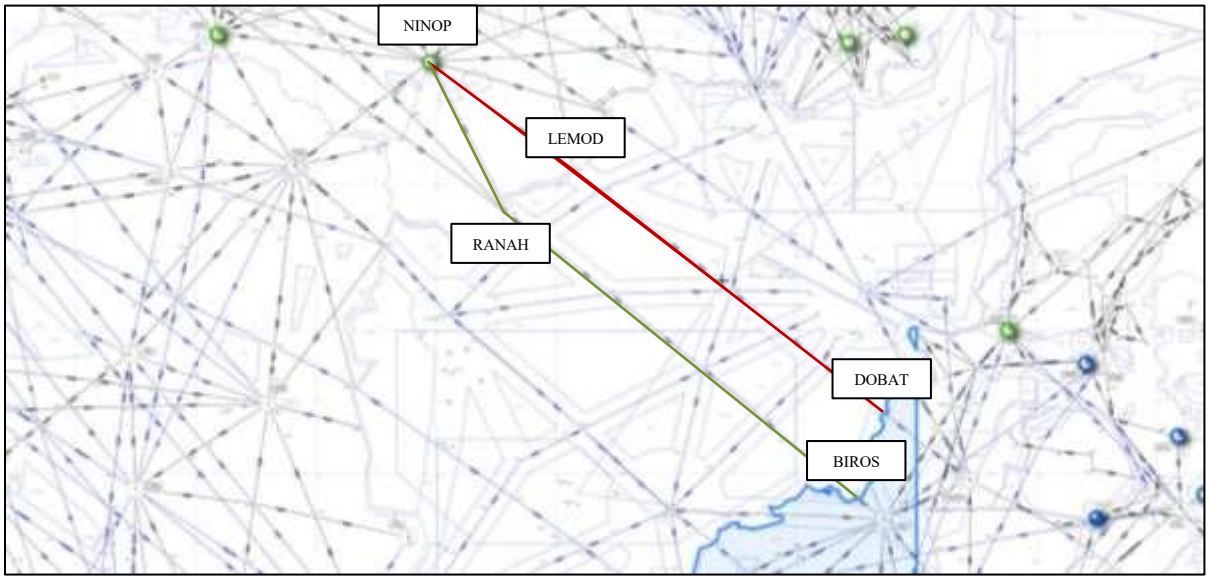
"Minimum longitudinal spacing between aircraft operating on the same contingency route and not vertically separated should be 15 minutes or 120 NM. However, this may be reduced to 10 minutes or 80 NM in conjunction with application of the Mach number

technique where authorized by the relevant authority and agreed in the appropriate LOA or other Contingency Arrangement."

2.5.2 Once 2.5.1 is implemented, BOBCAT system may use 10+5 minutes spacing over KABUL FIR TCPs, to provide 5 minutes buffer for flights.

2.5.3 Flight Level 300 may also be made available over DOBAT, BIROS, ASLUM & SERKA.

2.5.4 As a last resort flights intending to exit via DOBAT are sometimes rerouted by Lahore ACC to avoid excessive delays. They are offered to exit via BIROS and then follow he route segment BIROS – RANAH – NINOP instead of DOBAT – LEMOD – NINOP. IATA may approach operators to spread awareness regarding this option.



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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