



International Civil Aviation Organization

WORKING PAPER

A42-WP/99

EC/4

30/7/25

ASSEMBLY — 42ND SESSION

ECONOMIC COMMISSION

Agenda Item 26: Economic Development of Air Transport

THE SEVENTH WORLDWIDE AIR TRANSPORT CONFERENCE

(Presented by the United Kingdom)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Seventh Worldwide Air Transport Conference (ATConf/7) in November 2026 will be ICAO's flagship international air transport event. It will focus solely on commercial, economic, and aero-political matters and provide an opportunity for Ministers, industry leaders, senior officials, and social partners to discuss major developments, build understanding and prepare policy proposals.

The international air transport sector has weathered significant disruption in the twelve years since ATConf/6 and there are plenty more challenges on the horizon. ATConf/7 will provide an overdue opportunity to reflect, draw conclusions, share experience, and begin to plan for an uncertain, challenging future.

Whilst work is still at an early stage to develop the detailed programme and content, this paper focusses on potential broad themes and the format for ATConf/7.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

- identify and adopt clear, compelling and easily expressed overarching themes for ATConf/7 as proposed in Section 2;
- agree that the event should adopt multiple formats as outlined in Section 3; and
- invite the Air Transport Regulation Panel (ATRP) to establish a dedicated Working Group, as proposed in Section 4, to help the secretariat and industry partners to plan ATConf/7, make recommendations to the Council and Secretary General and oversee delivery of the event.

<i>Strategic Goals:</i>	This working paper relates to Strategic Goal: The Economic Development of Air Transport Assures the Delivery of Economic Prosperity and Societal Well-Being for All
<i>Financial implications:</i>	N/A
<i>References:</i>	Strategic Plan 2026 - 2050

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Worldwide Air Transport Conference (ATConf) is a major thought-leading event intended to address the many challenges – and opportunities – associated with international air transport. It provides a unique opportunity for decision makers from across the globe to reflect on hard won experience, draw conclusions, share best practice and identify viable measures to help ensure a resilient and thriving air transport sector.

1.2 There have been six ATConfs to date and they are notionally intended to be held at approximately ten-year intervals. The most recent event – ATConf/6 - was held in Montreal from 18th to 22nd March 2013. However, ATConf/7 has been delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and is now provisionally scheduled for 16th to 20th November 2026, again in Montreal.

1.3 The international air transport sector is dynamic, agile and innovative and it is constantly evolving. Since ATConf/6, the sector has seen significant change with new commercial trends and practices, updated regulatory approaches and technological developments. The sector has also weathered many significant challenges, including, of course, the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic which harmed the global economy and, for instance, impacted particularly severely on international air transport. Nevertheless, the sector has demonstrated its considerable resilience and adaptability, and it continues to recover.

1.4 As the sector returns to, and moves beyond, pre-pandemic levels of activity, “building back better”, it relies on close collaboration between all stakeholders – whether government, industry or social partner. Our shared challenge with ATConf/7 is to support the continued recovery, resilience and development of international air transport.

1.5 Looking ahead, the sector will continue to face multiple challenges – including over-stretched supply chains, staff recruitment/retention, skills shortages, geopolitical volatility and how best to reconcile the desire for continued growth with the critical need for decarbonisation.

1.6 In planning for ATConf/7, the Air Transport Committee (ATC) asked the Air Transport Regulation Panel (ATRP) to consider potential themes and make proposals on the format of the event.

2. THEMES FOR THE EVENT

2.1 Back in 2013, ATConf/6 focussed on eight themes - market access; air carrier ownership and control; consumer protection; fair competition; safeguard measures; taxation of and other levies on international air transport; economics of airports and air navigation services; and implementation of ICAO policies and guidance.

2.2 In its initial deliberations earlier this year, the ATRP concluded that many of the themes from ATConf/6 remain relevant, but that there are notable additional topics that should be discussed and considered over the next ten years. For instance, these could include such things as ‘labour rights’, ‘recruitment, retention and skills shortages’, ‘over-stretched supply chains’, ‘decarbonisation vs economic growth’, ‘advanced air mobility’, ‘the long-term integrity of Air Service Agreements’, and ‘Artificial Intelligence’.

2.3 These are all valid and highly relevant themes for international air transport, but as a list and taken with any themes rolled over from ATConf/6, they do not provide a clear focus for ATConf/7. To grab attention, encourage participation, generate publicity, provoke a debate and provide focus, this paper proposes that ICAO should adopt a compelling overall theme for ATConf/7 and similarly catchy, but more specific, “tag lines” for each separate day of the event. This clearly requires further discussion and consultation between ICAO, its members, industry and social partners, but to illustrate the point:

- a potential overarching theme could be “*delivering growth and resilience in a volatile world*”; and
- potential themes for individual days could be expressed as questions, for example:
 - ‘*Is a robust supply chain just a pipedream?*’,
 - ‘*Can we grow and decarbonise?*’
 - ‘*How do we find and keep the people and skills we need?*’
 - ‘*Are Air Services Agreements (ASAs) still fit for purpose?*’.

2.4 This sort of approach could provide different “hooks” for moderators, speakers and associated events on each day of ATConf/7 and help signal that the event is intended to be challenging and transformative.

3. WHAT MIGHT THE EVENT LOOK LIKE?

3.1 As suggested in the executive summary, this paper assumes that the objective of ATConf/7 will be to provide an opportunity for Ministers, industry leaders (i.e. CEO level), senior officials, and social partners to discuss major developments, build contacts and understanding and prepare policy proposals.

3.2 To attract active participation from such people, the event needs to be high profile and to add value. Adopting clear themes for the event should help in this regard (see section 2 above) and the quality of participants will be a selling point in itself. However, another key factor in the success or otherwise of ATConf/7 will be the event format.

3.3 This paper builds on initial thoughts about the event format arising from work by the ATRP. It recommends adopting a format designed to ensure that ATConf/7 delegates are energised, enthused and derive genuine value from their participation.

3.4 The underpinning concept is that attendees should have a programme with lots of options across the five days of ATConf/7, allowing delegations and delegates to pick and choose who does what and when. The object of this approach is to keep the event moving – and not simply offer participants the option of sitting in an auditorium listening to others on a stage talking. There will be elements of this inevitably, but this paper suggests that ATConf/7 should aspire to offer much more – all with a view to injecting energy into the event by making it dynamic and kinetic.

3.5 Aside perhaps from opening/closing ceremonies, the event should always have multiple items taking place at the same time. For instance, there could be a speech in the main hall at the same time as a workshop in one side room, a “fireside chat” in another and maybe a networking event elsewhere. Concurrent exhibitions from industry could add further interest and variety. This approach should help ensure that, at any point during ATConf/7, there will be something going on that engages a delegate and ensures their active participation.

3.6 Industry and external stakeholders must be involved in the event and encouraged to share and input their thoughts. This should include traditional aviation stakeholders such as airlines, airports, manufacturers, leasing companies, trade unions etc. However, consideration should also be given to including other stakeholders such as, unmanned aerial vehicle/ Urban Air Mobility (UAV/UAM) companies, Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) development companies, Artificial Intelligence companies, Diversity & Inclusion programmes, World Economic Forum, and Meteorologists.

3.7 ATConf/7 falls very much in the realm of ATRP, but inputs should be encouraged from other ICAO panels considering related topics such as Safety, Security, Facilitation, Decarbonization and Legal. Similarly, inputs should be encouraged from other UN Agencies with an overlapping interest in ICAO's work on international air transport.

3.8 For such things as plenary sessions, panel discussions and “fireside chats”, careful selection of moderators will be a key factor in the success or otherwise of the event. If each day had a different theme, as suggested above, different, expert moderators could be invited to support the event on different days. The ideal moderator would be a recognised expert in their field with the charisma to energise panellists and audience and the confidence to challenge and question as appropriate.

4. **NEXT STEPS**

4.1 The ATRP has recognised that there is much further development needed to create a detailed agenda for ATConf/7. It is recommended that ATRP should establish a dedicated Working Group to continue to help the Secretariat to develop and finalise the ATConf/7 agenda and other plans for the event (for approval by the Council and Secretary General).

4.2 It is also recommended that ICAO and the ATRP should work with external partners to arrange and deliver ATConf/7. For instance, trade associations have much expertise in arranging major international events – there is no point in re-inventing the wheel and, in any case, to achieve the high level of ambition envisaged in this paper will require extensive industry participation.

— **END** —