



WORKING PAPER

ASSEMBLY — 41ST SESSION

TECHNICAL COMMISSION

Agenda Item 30: Aviation Safety and Air Navigation Policy

30.3 Relevant Outcomes of the High-level Conference on COVID-19, Safety Stream (HLCC 2021)

THE EXPERIENCE OF CENTRAL AMERICA – AERONAUTICAL SERVICE CONTINUITY WITH COCESNA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

(Presented by Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, members of the Central American Corporation for Air Navigation Services (COCESNA))

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper summarizes experience in the Central American Region and measures adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure the continuity of aeronautical services provided by COCESNA despite the unprecedented economic impact, and to maintain the required levels of safety for each of its member States and for civil aviation overall.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

- a) consider the best practices and initiatives of COCESNA in the Central American Region for the efficient management of air navigation services under its responsibility; and
- b) request ICAO to promote the development of guidance for a faster and more coordinated response to future events that lessens the impact on aviation, in cooperation with States on the basis of experience at the global level.

<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	This working paper relates to the Safety, Air Navigation Capacity and Efficiency, Aviation Security and Facilitation, Economic Development of Air Transport and Environmental Protection Strategic Objectives.
<i>Financial implications:</i>	
<i>References:</i>	COVID-19 Biosafety Protocol I&E COCESNA COCESNA COVID-19 Plan of Action for Essential Personnel COVID-19 Prevention Policies, PE-0086/2020 Circular PE-001/2020

¹ Spanish version provided by COCESNA.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The global crisis caused by the COVID-19 coronavirus and its different variants has had an unprecedented impact on the aviation industry, and the Central American Region has been no exception. It has been a challenge to maintain the continuity of air navigation services and ensure the required levels of safety. This paper describes how the Central American Corporation for Air Navigation Services (COCESNA) has coped with the new normal.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 In 2020, not only did border closures and travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic cost Central America 90 per cent of its air operations and revenue compared to 2019; the developments also hampered essential activities such as provision of air traffic services, preventive maintenance of aeronautical systems and equipment in remote parts of the Region, and in-flight inspections of radio navigation aids.

2.2 These events revealed the need to review the management model for air navigation services and adapt policies and procedures to an environment in constant flux, with the aim of maintaining the required levels of safety and improving technical and operational efficiency.

3. AIR TRAFFIC SERVICES

3.1 To mitigate the likelihood and consequences of infection and spread of the virus among air traffic controllers at the CENAMER control centre, Biosafety protocols and action plans were designed.

3.2 The Air Traffic Flow Management unit improved information sharing with airlines and adjacent air navigation service providers (ANSPs) in order to project the number of operations for the long, medium and short term. That information was used to create a dynamic scheduling mechanism that balances ATC demand and capacity. At the height of the pandemic when there was less traffic, back-up personnel were on hand in case any CENAMER on-duty controllers were infected with COVID-19.

3.3 While the COVID-19 variants have caused positive cases among ATS staff in recent months, air traffic service continuity has not been affected, nor has available ATS capacity at the control centre.

3.4 Now, air traffic has almost fully returned to pre-pandemic levels. To guarantee ATS staffing, it has been necessary to continue enforcing biosafety measures such as masking, indoor capacity limits and vaccination.

3.5 In addition, as part of a process of collaborative decision making with airlines and adjacent ANSPs, measures have been introduced to boost the efficiency of air operations such as clearance for more direct routes, generating savings for users and lowering CO2 emissions.

4. AERONAUTICAL MAINTENANCE MANAGEMENT

4.1 A comprehensive analysis was carried out on maintenance management, including routines and frequency intervals, in order to make changes where possible and ensure that the systems would be operational and compliant with industry requirements for availability and reliability.

4.2 The remote monitoring/control systems and access procedures were enhanced at sites where air navigation systems equipment is located, to mitigate the effects of reduced in-person visits due to travel restrictions in the Region. This allowed for a great deal of basic maintenance to be performed remotely on communications, navigation, surveillance, automation, meteorology, energy and auxiliary systems. In cases where remote management was found not to be feasible, in-person maintenance was carried out as usual. During the strictest lockdowns imposed by governments in the Region, local authorities granted safe passage to technical personnel as essential workers. All of these arrangements were possible thanks to remote management capabilities and performance assessment systems already in place in COCESNA prior to the pandemic, and to the improvements that were implemented so promptly.

4.3 The continuous monitoring of systems and the safety and performance indicators showed that the changes introduced allowed for on-going efficient management by the Corporation, with no impact on the required levels of safety. With the easing of travel restrictions, COCESNA has continued to ensure the maintenance and prevent wear and tear of critical infrastructure, especially at remote sites with harsh environmental conditions.

4.4 In the case of radio navigation aids inspection, COCESNA had to establish strict biosafety protocols and procedures in accordance with conditions and regulations of States in the Region to protect COCESNA aircraft crew, conduct verification missions and comply with applicable standards to ensure optimal performance of radio aids in Central America.

5. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

5.1 COCESNA proactively introduced cost-cutting measures. It reviewed active projects under its Comprehensive Investment Plan, immediately freezing strategic and operational projects not yet begun or confirmed, and moving ahead only with critical investments already under contract that were essential for continuity in COCESNA and its member States.

5.2 COCESNA met with stakeholders including critical providers, to take additional extraordinary measures such as cancelling contracts not yet begun, freezing non-critical parts of contracts, suspending and/or reprogramming activities for 2021 and 2022, and adjusting terms of payment so as to improve cash flow. The support of providers throughout the crisis was important to COCESNA and its member States, and we are grateful for all the cooperation.

5.3 COCESNA also reached out to financial institutions to improve financing terms, on the basis of the financial model of the Corporation and taking into account the different income recovery projections and scenarios. The objective was to protect the strategic reserve and ensure business continuity in COCESNA and member States with informed, risk-assessed decisions.

5.4 The challenge has been enormous. We continue to support the measures adopted by the Corporation, checking each dollar spent and making only those investments that are critical to ensuring air navigation service continuity and achieving economic recovery. These efforts will yield a new

Comprehensive Investment Plan to ensure essential services and introduce operational improvements in keeping with the Global Air Navigation Plan (GANP) as we adapt to the new normal and the emerging needs of the Region. The positive cost-benefit equation guarantees that no country will be left behind, and that we will get through this crisis.

5.5 Despite the economic crisis, COCESNA has continued to deliver critical projects for the benefit of the Corporation and its member States.

6. **PROPOSED ACTION**

6.1 The Assembly is invited to:

- a) Consider the best practices and initiatives of COCESNA in the Central American Region for the efficient management of air navigation services under its responsibility;
- b) Request ICAO to promote the development of guidance for a faster and more coordinated response to future events that lessens the impact on aviation, in cooperation with States on the basis of experience at the global level.