

1 April 2014

Trial aims to cut Heathrow holding times

The XMAN project : the first live trial tested between NATS and DSNA to cut Heathrow holding times

A new operational procedure to cut the amount of time aircraft circle in 'holding stacks' at London Heathrow Airport is set to begin today.

Traditionally NATS, the UK's air traffic service provider, has only been able to influence an arriving aircraft's approach to Heathrow once it enters UK airspace – sometimes only 80 miles from the airport. This limits the opportunity to manage the flow of traffic and can result in additional time spent in the holding stacks.

From today, if delays in the Heathrow holding stacks begin to build, air traffic controllers in the Netherlands, France, Scotland and Ireland will be asked to slow down aircraft up to 350 miles away from London to help minimise delays on arrival.

The trial is being led by NATS in close cooperation with French air traffic control provider, DSNA, the Maastricht Upper Area Control Centre and Prestwick Control Centre, with the aim of cutting average holding times by at least a quarter from the current time of just under 8 minutes.

In a pre-trial test of the system, the first ever live data – flight BAW74 - was passed between NATS and French air traffic controllers at DSNA's Reims control centre in the early hours of 21 March 2014.

Martin Rolfe, Managing Director, Operations at NATS, commented: "This is the first cross border arrivals management – or XMAN - trial of its kind anywhere in the world and a great example of partnership working for the benefit of our customers and a potential future model for the industry. We expect the trial to be a significant benefit to our airline customers in terms of fuel savings."

"Slowing aircraft down during the en-route phase of flight when they are much higher will save fuel and CO₂ emissions, while reducing the impact of noise for those living under the holding stacks in the south east of England."

Maurice Georges, DSNA Chief Executive Officer, added: "I am pleased with this collaboration between NATS and DSNA for this ambitious project in the FABEC development. Our operational teams are very enthusiastic."

Gerald Regniaud, Project Leader for Reims Area Control Centre, explained: "A dedicated HMI has been specifically developed to display London-Heathrow Arrival Management Information directly at the Control Working Position. Thus, from 350Nm out of the runway, when aircraft are still at cruising level, they will have their speed controlled in order to absorb up to 3 minutes of delay".

The trial, which is a partnership between members of FABEC and the UK/Ireland FAB, will run until the end of 2014.

ENDS

About NATS

NATS is the UK's leading provider of Air Traffic Management (ATM) services, handling 2.1 million flights in 2012/13, covering the UK and eastern North Atlantic. NATS provides air traffic control from centres at Swanwick, Hampshire and Prestwick, Ayrshire. NATS also provides air traffic control services at 15 UK airports including Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh and Glasgow; at Gibraltar Airport and, in a joint venture with Ferrovial, at a number of airport towers in Spain.

Building on its well-established reputation for expertise and innovation, NATS is growing its business worldwide, and now has contracts in more than 30 countries. NATS offers aerodrome, data and consultancy solutions to customers including airports, air traffic service providers and Governments. There is more information on the NATS website at www.nats.co.uk

About DSNA

DSNA (Direction des Services de la Navigation Aérienne) is the French Air Navigation Service Provider within direction générale de l'Aviation civile (DGAC). DSNA handled 2.8 million flights in 2013. DSNA is a member of FABEC, SESAR JU and the A6 Alliance.

Key Data: 5 ACCs & 81 Control Towers & 3 overseas regional structures / Staff: 7,700 / Absolute record in one week: 66,011 flights from 1st to 7 July 2013 (9,430 flights per day on average).
