

# Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd submission of 3 March 2022

## PE1804/WW Halt Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd's Air Traffic Management Strategy

Following the meeting of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on 2 February, we write to update the Committee on the outcome of the ballot of Prospect members on the future strategic direction for the ATMS programme agreed by the HIAL Board on 24 January.

The ballot closed on Monday 21 February, with the majority of HIAL's air traffic controllers accepting the new direction for the programme.

We are pleased that our colleagues have recognised the level of engagement and the compromise position that HIAL and Prospect have worked hard to achieve. There are fiscal and regulatory hurdles to overcome and moving forward we will continue to work closely with our air traffic colleagues and seek their input to develop the necessary detail.

We would like to take this opportunity to address some of the points raised by the Petitioners in their submission PE1804/UU and to address some of the points raised in the oral submissions given at the committee meeting held on 2 February 2022, from parliamentary members Liam McArthur and Rhoda Grant.

As we have previously informed the committee, we established new ATMS working groups to help detail the benefits and risks of a potential way forward. The output from these groups was discussed by the Board when making their decision on 24 January.

Without wishing to reiterate our previously stated position, HIAL has resolved the impasse with Prospect and agreed a new way forward, which has now been approved by our air traffic colleagues. This has taken compromise on both sides and all relevant parties are now focused on delivering a system that is safe and fit for purpose.

Once again, we reiterate that safety is paramount. At every stage, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is informed of our plans.

Regarding cooperative surveillance and multiple endorsements, having received confirmation that the CAA see no regulatory impediment to either, HIAL will continue to develop proposals for scrutiny by the regulator.

The new proposal for a combined surveillance centre will bring all our approach services together under the one roof and enable controllers to operate approach services for multiple airports which increases resilience across the estate and is not uncommon in the UK.

We have also agreed with the union and notified the CAA that HIAL intends to phase out procedural air traffic control services and will move forward with more modern and widely used techniques, practiced globally.

To suggest that HIAL will “dust down” the remote tower proposals four or five years down the line and seek to reintroduce them is misleading and unhelpful.

Our goal in introducing remote tower technology was to provide an air traffic management system that would future proof air traffic provision and provide the overall resilience we believe the technology offers. However, we acknowledge and respect the position of our colleagues, and have therefore agreed an alternative delivery strategy which has meant compromise on both sides.

In the medium to longer term, we cannot predict how the aviation industry and technology will advance in the years to come and that is why we have programmed in a review in five years against a framework, jointly agreed with Prospect to look at all aspects of ATC.

None of the petitioners are directly involved in the programme or directly impacted by it and we note that their opinion appears to be at odds with Prospect and the majority of HIAL’s air traffic controllers who voted to accept the revised proposals for the modernisation of air traffic services in the Highlands and Islands.

Questions have been raised on the spend on the project to date and I enclose the link to the breakdown of the budget programme that was published on our [website](#).

The financial investment in the programme thus far provides a stable platform to move forward with the essential modernisation of air traffic services in the Highlands and Islands.

The investment is already benefiting the organisation and providing resilience through the recruitment of seven Ab-initio staff (trainee air traffic controllers) for the modernisation programme and who are supporting operations for Sumburgh, Dundee, Wick and Kirkwall airports.

HIAL has also invested further in the training of our air traffic colleagues by purchasing an air traffic simulator and recruiting an in-house training team, who are currently located at New Century House. Working with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), this equipment and training has been utilised as part of the project for approach radar services for Sumburgh Airport and will benefit our ATCO training

programme moving forward. By way of background, the approach services for Sumburgh are currently provided by NATS from Aberdeen and will be provided in-house at the end of the current contract.

New Century House forms part of the HIAL estate. It has already been used by HIAL personnel, including those who are part of the Sumburgh Radar Team and Air Traffic Control Training Team.

The building remains a valuable asset and allows scope for development as we move forward as a business.

As we have previously stated, further separate talks are set to take place on air traffic services for Benbecula and Wick John O'Groats airports. We do not wish to pre-empt the outcome of these talks; however, we will be happy to update the Committee when the future direction is formulated.

We trust this provides the Committee with the up-to-date position on the strategy for the modernisation of air traffic services in the Highlands and

Islands. However, we would be happy to answer any further questions the Committee may have.