Edward Mountain
Convener
Rural Economy & Connectivity Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Sent via email to: rec.committee@parliament.scot

21st March 2018

Dear Mr Mountain

Thank you for your letter March 12th in which you highlight a number of concerns raised by the trade union Prospect.

In the first instance it is important to stress that our working relationship with Prospect is positive.

Having taken the in principle decision to proceed with the remote tower project we have involved Prospect throughout. Most recently we have written to them and asked that they sit on the project Board which they have accepted and will represent all of the trade unions represented at HIAL.

On the specific points raised;

- It is not our intention to introduce a system which is less reliable than that which we currently use. Indeed part of the rationale for pursuing the remote tower project is the potential to strengthen the provision of air traffic services across the Highlands not only in the short term but crucially over the longer term. Adequate communications infrastructure is essential in so doing and preliminary works indicate sufficient available provision.

  It is an important point that Prospect has raised. HIAL operates in a highly regulated environment and put simply, our regulator the CAA would not permit the introduction of a system which lacked resilience or redundancy.

- HIAL have yet to decide on the location for the remote centre, that decision will be taken in July and will be informed by a comprehensive independent review of the options available. Until that point we are unable to be specific about the impacts on
our staff. However we do recognise that any move to centralise, regardless of where the centre will be, is likely to cause concern amongst our staff and their families. With that in mind, once the decision on the remote centre has been decided upon, our efforts will be directed toward ensuring that the impact on our staff, will as far as is practically possible, be minimised.

- Over the longer term, the project has the ability to deliver the least cost option for the Company. However and to be clear, any significant change to HIAL’s operating model for ANS provision will introduce a step change in costs, but this change is roughly similar for each of the options. In the longer term ie beyond the 15 year horizon, efficiencies related to lower staff operating costs observed in the Remote Towers and centralised APS option start to outweigh the high up-front capital expenditure.

Whilst cost was an important factor in our deliberations it was not the key driver. Our prime concern was and remains the sustainability of air traffic services across the Highlands and Islands, without which it will not be possible to guarantee services to the airlines who provide the lifeline services in the area.

- Every project carries risk and this project is no different. We intend to mitigate the risk as far as is practicably possible by employing the most appropriate people strategy, ensuring it is adequately resourced and by putting the necessary funding in place. I am confident on all fronts.

- HIAL has not finalised its deliberations on dual mode control and will only do so once the majority of our safety case work has been completed. The safety case work which may approve dual control will require CAA approval.

Hopefully this provides you with sufficient detail to answer the concerns raised by Prospect. If it does not please call or alternatively I am happy to meet with you and your colleagues on the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee along with representatives from Prospect.

Yours sincerely

Inglis Lyon
Managing Director