

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

3rd Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday 8
September 2021

PE1804: Halt Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd's Air Traffic Management Strategy

Note by the Clerk

PE1804: Lodged 6 May 2020

Petitioners	Alasdair MacEachen, John Doig and Peter Henderson on behalf of Benbecula Community Council.
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to halt Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd's Air Traffic Management Strategy Project to conduct an independent assessment of the decisions and decision-making process of the ATMS project.
Webpage	https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1804

Introduction

1. The Session 5 Public Petitions Committee (PPC) last considered this petition at its meeting on [24 March 2021](#). At that meeting, the PPC agreed to continue this petition and include it in its legacy paper for the Session 6 successor Committee, along with a suggestion to seek an update from the Scottish Government on the issues of concern raised during the evidence session.
2. A summary of past consideration of the petition and suggested areas for future investigation is provided for the Committee's consideration.

Background

3. The HIAL Air Traffic Management Strategy (ATMS) will change the operating model used to deliver its Air Navigation Services (ANS) provision, to one that uses Controlled Airspace (CAS), Centralised Surveillance (APS) and Remote Towers.

4. HIAL states that the strategy aims to—
 - enhance safety,
 - improve resilience,
 - work within a changing legislative framework,
 - update ageing operating models, and
 - take account of staff recruitment and retention issues.

5. The petitioners state that the strategy is expensive, unsafe and will cost the islands well paid jobs as air traffic controllers will be centralised in Inverness.

6. During its consideration of this petition, the PPC received 39 written submissions and took oral evidence from—
 - [Petitioners John Doig and Peter Henderson](#) [1 October 2020];
 - [Inglis Lyon, Managing Director; Gary Cobb, Chief Operating Officer; and Pat Nolan, ATM Professional Advisor, Highlands and Islands Airport Ltd.](#) [17 February 2021]; and
 - [Michael Matheson, Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity; and Gary Cox, Head of Aviation, Transport Scotland](#) [24 February 2021].

7. Concerns have been raised throughout by not only the petitioners, but also many of those providing submissions and the MSPs who are supporting the petition. These concerns include—
 - the costs involved in the project;
 - the safety of the remote tower solution;
 - whether it is appropriate to use Automatic Dependent Surveillance Broadcast (ADS-B), rather than primary and secondary radar as part of the project; and
 - whether the project will address fundamental questions of resilience given the reluctance of air traffic controllers to move to the new air traffic control centre in Inverness.

Costs and governance

8. In their evidence, HIAL confirmed that the overall budget for the programme was agreed with Transport Scotland's Investment Decision Board on the 9 December 2019.

9. The total budget for the project is £48.4 million. Of this, £37.4 million relates to capital costs containing a contingency element of £5.5 million. £13.7 million relates to revenue costs containing a contingency element of £1.3 million.
10. In their evidence, HIAL and the Scottish Government have both assured the Committee that the project is on budget, and that no part of the contingency element of the budget has been spent to date.
11. In terms of governance, the Scottish Government's Technology Assurance Framework applies to all new digital public services and new investments in technology, and therefore covers this project.
12. As such, an independent review team conduct health checks of the project, reviewing it against the framework. One such health check of the ATMS resulted in [report](#) that was delivered in January 2021.
13. In their latest written submission of 26 May 2021, [PE1804/LL](#), HIAL stated this report made 12 recommendations relating to programme management, governance, resourcing, procurement and strategic oversight and assurance.
14. In the same submission, HIAL confirmed that ten of the recommendations had already been actioned with good progress being made on the outstanding two recommendations.
15. As it is an ongoing progress, the review team will be able to consider the effectiveness of the actions taken when it conducts its next Health Check.

Surveillance technology and safety

16. When providing oral evidence to the Committee, representatives from HIAL stated that the Air Traffic Management Strategy is the only option which can deliver the level of resilience required in the medium to long term.
17. The Strategy is made up of several component parts. Before each component part can be deployed, it must receive overarching "approval" from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). Each component then forms part of the safety case for the strategy as a whole.
18. In its submission, [PE1804/HH](#), the CAA explained that it had been engaged in the project since its infancy, and meets HIAL's project team regularly.
19. It confirmed that the changes being proposed by HIAL have been successfully deployed elsewhere in the world, and stated that it has no major safety concerns with the proposals presented by HIAL.

20. The petitioners believe that it is risky to depend on the Automatic Dependent Surveillance Broadcast (ADS-B) technology, which is a critical element of the Strategy.
21. In its evidence HIAL stated that, as a consequence on its ongoing engagement with the CAA, it is confident that ADS-B will be adopted as a method of surveillance.
22. It admits, however, that should this not be the case, the back up plan would be primary and secondary radar. This would require a full tender exercise, with the expectation that it would cost more than ADS-B.

Resilience

23. Concerns have been raised repeatedly about the reluctance of air traffic controllers to re-locate to Inverness to staff the new control centre.
24. Following its evidence session on 24 February, the Committee wrote to the then Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity to ask for details on the proposed commuting policy, including any feedback which had been received.
25. In his response of 17 March 2021, the Cabinet Secretary stated that the commuting policy is currently subject to consultation with the trade union. HIAL has received initial feedback from Prospect on the draft policy and discussions continue.
26. On 29 July, Prospect members working in air traffic control for HIAL held a one-day strike to protest the centralising of air traffic control in Inverness. The union stated that the strike marked an escalation in industrial action which has been ongoing since January.
27. When giving evidence on 17 February, HIAL stated that it would do everything practicable to help staff members find the right solution for them.
28. It stated, however, that some staff members “will have to relocate to the centre in Inverness because, unless we build a resilient operation there, our ability to provide air traffic services in one of Scotland’s essential pieces of transport infrastructure will be compromised.”

Petitioner submission

29. In their most recent submission of [9 June 2021](#), the petitioners continue to question the decision to operate an Aerodrome Flight Information Service, (AFIS) rather than Air Traffic Control (ATC) at Benbecula and Wick.

30. They believe that the change is a reduction to the service available, which will inevitably cause excessive delays in bad weather.

Action

31. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerk to the Committee

Annexe

The following submissions are circulated in connection with consideration of the petition at this meeting-

- [PE1804/JJ: Highlands and Islands Airport Ltd submission of 2 March 2021 \(103KB pdf\)](#)
- [PE1804/KK: Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Infrastructure and Connectivity submission of 17 March 2021 \(73KB pdf\)](#)
- [PE1804/LL: Highlands and Islands Airports Limited submission of 26 May 2021](#)
- [PE1804/MM: Petitioner submission of 9 June 2021](#)

The Scottish Parliament launched a new website at the end of Session 5.

All written submissions received on the petition before May 2021 can be viewed on the petition on the [archive webpage](#). Written submissions received on the petition after May 2021 can be viewed on its [new webpage](#).