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APPLICATION OF CAPACITY ENHANCEMENT FUNCTION IN EUROPEAN ATM NETWORK

The Capacity Enhancement Function (CEF) sits within the Airspace Network & Capacity section of the ATM Centre of Expertise. It provides a single focal point of coordination for all capacity-related issues, both within the EUROCONTROL Agency and for external stakeholders. The Capacity Enhancement Function acts as a catalyst for establishing and progressing cohesive and timely capacity planning and provision, at European ATM network and local level.

To prevent delays once again escalating, there is a clear need for:

- Air Navigation Service Providers to review and upgrade local capacity plans, ensuring that they are realistic and to commit to their full implementation;
- all ATM stakeholder to reinforce the European ATM network programmes;
- the full integration, at network level, of capacity planning, civil/military cooperation, airspace design & management, airport operations and flow and capacity management.

The current recession has shifted the focus of airline operators to flight efficiency rather than ATFM delay, but this could quickly change when traffic growth again accelerates. Delays could rapidly escalate to levels approaching those of ten years ago and it is essential that the processes in place for capacity enhancement and delay reduction are functioning and effective, and that ANSPs do not cut costs in the short term at the expense of long term capacity.

Capacity planning processes is a cyclical process, requiring full commitment from all stakeholders and the implementation of truly collaborative decision-making processes. The Capacity Planning Task Force, comprising capacity managers, planners and user groups, discusses key improvements to the medium-term capacity planning process and tools and agrees the work programme for the coming year. The development plan for the capacity planning tools is discussed, prioritised and agreed with ANSPs and airline associations and follows their expressed requirements.

Air traffic delays occur for a variety of reasons, ranging from bad weather conditions causing runway closure, the need for de-icing, or strong cross-winds, to technical failure or operational problems affecting flight preparation and departure. Airport congestion and lack of Air Traffic Management (ATM) capacity (i.e. the inability of Air Traffic Control to handle all the flights wanting to cross a particular volume of airspace within a certain time) are other important causes of delay.

The Agency plays a coordinating role, with full support and cooperation from ANSPs and aircraft operators. Fully interactive capacity planning processes and sophisticated tools, the coordinated development of the airspace structure and the Agency's improved management of the European network have contributed to a greatly improved performance over the last decade.

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