

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

2nd Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday 2  
February 2022

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

### Note by the Clerk

**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. This is a continued petition that was last considered by the Committee at its meeting on [17 November 2021](#).
2. At that meeting the Committee agreed to write to the Highlands and Islands Airport Limited (HIAL), Highland Aviation and the Scottish Government.
3. Submissions have been received from HIAL and the Scottish Government.

### Scottish Government submission

4. Further to its submission of 12 October, the Scottish Government's latest submission provides an update following the Assurance of Action Plan conducted in the week commencing 25 October.

5. The Scottish Government explains that the Assurance of Action Plan was set in the context of the Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd (HIAL) announcement of 25 October that a framework for discussion had been agreed with Prospect [the trade union] to establish a new way forward for the implementation of the Air Traffic Management Strategy (ATMS) Programme. It noted that programme delivery activities were largely paused to enable further delivery options to be appraised.
6. The submission also provides a further update on progress relating to the Assurance of Action Plan and confirms that the Digital Assurance Office, Portfolio, Programme and Project Assurance team and HIAL would continue to liaise to ensure that appropriate assurance arrangements are planned in as decisions are taken on the Programme's direction.

## Highlands and Islands Airport Ltd submission (HIAL)

7. In its submission of 21 December 2021, HIAL clarifies a number of points that were raised at the last Committee consideration on the 17 November.
8. The submission explains that on 25 October, HIAL agreed a framework for discussion with Prospect resulting in all industrial action being suspended while these talks continue with the aim of creating a modern air traffic service whilst considering feedback from stakeholders, local communities and air traffic colleagues.
9. Following this, new ATMS working groups were established with twenty-seven air traffic colleagues from across several airports colleagues to help detail the benefits and risks of a potential way forward. The first of these groups met on 6 December.
10. In relation to potential safety concerns, HIAL stresses in its submission that safety is paramount, noting that the Civil Aviation Authority has been involved in ATMS since its infancy and it has confirmed (via a submission to the Committee) that it has no major safety concerns with the proposals presented by HIAL.
11. The submission details the next steps for the ATMS project as of December 2021, which included:
  - The introduction of a surveillance programme across the HIAL network with surveillance services provided for Stornoway, Sumburgh, Kirkwall, Inverness, and Dundee airports from a combined surveillance centre in Inverness.

- The phasing out of procedural air traffic control services and the adoption of more modern and widely used techniques, practiced globally.
- Air traffic services being provided locally at Stornoway, Sumburgh, Kirkwall and Dundee for the duration of the surveillance programme, with air traffic control for Inverness being provided remotely from the combined surveillance centre.
- A review of air traffic provision against a scope, agreed by HIAL and Prospect, to inform the next steps of the programme. The review to be undertaken at the end of the surveillance programme, or at five years, whichever is soonest.

12. HIAL also confirmed talks would take place on air traffic services for Benbecula and Wick John O'Groats airports separately. HIAL highlights that proposals as a result of these discussions may have significant cost, regulatory and governance hurdles to overcome.
13. The submission also provides further information about a building purchase related to the ATMS project and analysis of whether there is a need for primary radar.
14. In closing, the submission states that HIAL is currently reviewing the best long-term solution for its air traffic management whilst considering alternative deployment methods. HIAL confirms that it will not take forward any proposals until discussions and workgroups with Prospect and air traffic colleagues have concluded. Once completed, a report will be sent to the HIAL Board for consideration and once agreed with Prospect, a fiscal and regulatory assessment will play a key role in the formulation of a final agreement.

## HIAL announcement 27 January 2022 and Media coverage

15. HIAL through their [website](#) subsequently made an announcement on 27 January 2022 that, following a HIAL Board meeting on the 24th January to discuss the future direction for the ATMS, the Board agreed the future strategic direction for the ATMS programme. This will comprise a centralised surveillance operation for Sumburgh, Kirkwall, Stornoway, Inverness, and Dundee airports, based at HIAL's existing approach radar facility on the Inverness Airport Site. Air traffic tower services will continue to be provided locally at each of these airports.

16. The statement on HIAL's website suggests that the Board also agreed that a further working group should be established to discuss the future service delivery options for Benbecula and Wick John O'Groats airports. The output of this group will be presented at a future meeting of the HIAL Board to inform the strategic direction for these airports.
17. The ATMS project has been the subject of several media articles throughout January including [BBC news](#) and [the Orcadian](#).

## Action

18. 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/SS: Scottish Government submission of 21 November 2021](#)

[PE1804/TT: Submission from Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd of 21 December 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](#).