

Prioritising Business Continuity

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Aviation remains the critical backbone of our economy. Until recently our focus was on airspace capacity and managing the increasing volume of flights with the same workforce. Today, as we come to terms with the impact of COVID-19 on the aviation industry, it is key for us to pull together and remain resilient as flights in many countries remain grounded, reducing capacity needs for the time being.

But this current situation has certainly shown the need for updated business continuity concepts and plans to ensure appropriate controller staffing, as was recently outlined by several ANSPs in a CANSO-organised webinar. We have already seen cases where ATC service in a sector was interrupted, due to a suspected COVID-19 case affecting a control-

ler. Today's operational ATC concept does not allow another sector to immediately take over operations, even if complete area control centres (ACCs) must be taken out of service. These incidents demonstrate, more than ever, the need to design, plan, and implement business continuity measures, even beyond national or regional borders.

In Europe, Frequentis is part of the SESAR Virtual Centre effort to drive the technical and operational implementation of the virtual centre concept. This would allow air traffic control operations to be carried out at another location, removing the need for an ATC suspension. By geographically decoupling ATM services from location, virtual centres increase agility, capacity, and cost-efficiency, while enabling better contingency planning. The concept's principles are already realised with remote digital towers, allowing ATC services to be provided away from the airport. But what do we still need to allow full cross-border collaboration?

The first thing we need is a more harmonised concept of operations (CONOPS) to allow properly trained controllers to manage a different sector of another airspace. Next, we need a more networked approach to the way ATM systems are connected, enabling safe and secure data exchange, even across national borders. Finally, it requires a joint effort by ANSPs and policy makers to ensure we have



the proper legislation to enable such an operational concept.

We don't doubt that things will return to normal, people will continue to travel, and goods will need to be transported. One thing we are certain of, and is also clear in the current climate, is that when we work together on a common goal, we are far more likely to succeed. Perhaps this recent situation is a chance for us to look more closely at the long-term challenges we have ahead of us and jointly implement solutions which enable a resilient, sustainable air transport system, robust enough to withstand potential future crises. What the industry has gained is an increased drive to prioritise business continuity.



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