

**Twenty Third Meeting of the
Informal South Pacific ATS Co-ordinating Group (ISPACG/23)**

Santiago, Chile, 26-27 March 2009

Agenda Item 4: Review Open Action Items

Changes to the ICAO Flight Plan – 2012

(Presented by IATA)

SUMMARY

State Letter AN13/2.1-08/50, announced significant changes to the ICAO Flight Plan (FPL) by amendment to PANS ATM, Doc 4444. These changes should bring a marked improvement in service and benefits. However, such changes will require major system changes for both airlines and ANSP's. As airlines plan to meet the effective date of 15 November 2012, they are concerned with the logistics of managing a long-term random transition among the ANSP's at a global level.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 On 25 June 2008 ICAO issued State Letter AN13/2.1-08/50 amending the 15th edition of the PANS-ATM, Doc 4444. Although the format will remain relatively consistent with that being used today, numerous changes will be required in the abbreviations and various Field descriptors used in the ICAO Flight Plan form.
- 1.2 Substantial system and work practice changes will be required by Airlines and ANSP's alike, as a consequence of these modifications. Therefore, IATA considers these changes as a 'significant difference' to ICAO PANS-ATM – Doc.4444.
- 1.3 Airline systems will need to conform to the new data fields, sequence and alphanumeric coding. Likewise, adaptation within the ATS Providers' flight data processing systems will need to ensure that the new flight plans filed are accepted without any cause for reject or denial of service. Although the effective date for the changes in the Filed Flight Plan (FPL) is November 15, 2012, airlines and States can transition to the new format at any time.
- 1.4 Airlines have the following concerns:
 - a) The unusually long transition period prior to the November 15, 2012 effective date may result in Regulators, airlines and ANSP's changing over at random.
 - b) The possible post-implementation challenges after November 15, 2012, by those States and providers unable to implement by the deadline and the consequences to airlines.

2. DISCUSSION

- 2.1 The main rationale for the new FPL format is to allow users to benefit from modern aircraft capabilities, such as PBN. Such changes are fully embraced by the airlines.
- 2.2 During the transition period, users will face the decision whether to maintain the functionality of the 'old' system ahead of the 15 November 2012 applicability date. This is typically the challenge for operations that flies across multiple FIR's. In all likelihood, some of these ANSP's will transition early. However, supporting and maintaining two FPL systems for an extended period, as well as planning for a flight that crosses successive FIR's in different stages of implementation is impractical from a service and logistical point of view.
- 2.3 Changes to airline flight planning systems will entail major modifications to the automation, databases and formatting. A large part of the reconstructed Field descriptors and sequence of entries will result in major software changes and/or system replacement, all with consequent costs.
- 2.4 In view of the enhanced services that these new data elements should provide, they can only be justified by airlines as a one-time effort. Moreover in managing the transition effectively, airline flight planning/dispatch services work to high degree with automation. Without a significant increase in workload it would be inconceivable to anticipate any manual modifications.
- 2.5 The functional nature of airline Flight Planning operations whereby FPL's are filed from a remote and centralized location precludes awareness of local requirements, peculiarities, host system limitations etc. This is particularly the case with medium to large airlines operating an international network. Filing of the FPL is done electronically.

3 Implications on Users

- 3.1 The implications on Users will be two-fold:
 - 3.1.1 Adaptability to current airline flight planning software and work practices.
 - a) **Costs:** Most airline flight planning systems are vendor-solutions. Hence, it will not be a viable option for airlines to sustain both systems simultaneously either during or after the transition.
 - b) **Automation:** Sequencing and formatting the FPL format to allow a partial dissemination of 'some OLD' and 'some NEW' during the transition will be impractical for a dispatcher in terms of workload and manual interventions.
 - c) The challenge of accurately **tracking Transition dates** - as States randomly migrate from 'OLD' to 'NEW', as well as
 - d) **Tracking States** that have not or chose not to adopt the PANS ATM changes.

3.1.2 Adaptability to local and en-route host Air Traffic Information Systems.

- a) The possibility for an airline needing to support the ‘OLD’ and ‘NEW’ **during** the Transition period. This dual requirement could stem from the airline route network, operating across a mix of many airports
- b) The possibility for an airline that is required to support the ‘OLD’ and ‘NEW’ **after** the Transition period. This requirement could stem from a decision by a local AIS facility that decides not to convert.
- c) Specific residual ANSP peculiarities or host limitations that remain post-2012 (e.g. restricted number of characters in Item 10, required sequences in field 18, etc.) The logistics of tracking and compliance would be extremely complex.
- d) That **all** host systems interpret new fields and transform data globally and seamlessly to deliver service at departure and downstream points.
- e) With the possibility of airline changeover decision being the dictate of an ANSP service, it is foreseeable in some rare cases that some airlines will remain with the ‘old’ well after the 2012 deadline.

4. Side Note

4.1 Although outside the scope of this working paper, it remains worthwhile to mention the legal status of the ICAO flight plan format. Many have questioned why the ICAO flight plan format contained in the PANS-ATM is not an ICAO Standard? ICAO Doc 8143 (Directives to Divisional-type Air Navigation Meetings and Rules of Procedure for their Conduct) outlines the following criteria for the development of SARPS:

- a) To qualify as a Standard, the specification must be such that its uniform application by all Contracting States is necessary in the interests of safety or regularity of international air navigation.
- b) To qualify as a Recommended Practice, a specification must be such that its uniform application by all Contracting States is considered desirable, but not essential, in the interests of safety, regularity or efficiency of international air navigation.

4.2 It should be further noted that the Standards of Annex 2 and Annex 11 govern the application of the *Procedures for Air Navigation Services – Air Traffic Management* (PANS-ATM, Doc 4444). Although the contents of a flight plan are an Annex 2 Standard, the format is not. However, the flight planning automation systems of airlines and the flight data processing systems of ANSP’s are totally dependant upon clearly defined fields and format. In today’s world of required automation support, IATA is of the opinion that a uniform application of the ICAO flight plan into a specific electronic format is necessary for the interests of safety and regularity of international aviation.

5. ACTION BY THE MEETING

5.1 On the basis of feedback from Airline users, IATA urges the meeting to:

- a. Universally adopt without exception, that effective 15 November 2012 all States will accept and disseminate 'NEW' FPL's only.
- b. Universally implement the new FPL system globally on 15 November 2012 in order to assure a seamless and timely transition with no loss of service. If this cannot be agreed then its preferable to set a minimum transition period.
- c. In the unlikely event that an ANSP does not implement, that State shall notify the fact in part 1 of their AIP as a 'significant difference' to the PANS ATM as described under Annex 15, 4.1.2-c, prior to November 15, 2012.