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Des Mr Wheadon

Thank you for your letter of September 29 regarding the departure route trial at Heathrow. I apologise for the delay in replying, due in part to Heathrow Airport's decision last week to end the trial early, and then awaiting the public meeting last night, to which you refer.

I hear it was a robust and constructive meeting, and we were pleased to support Heathrow Airport Ltd by having our Head of Environment, Ian Jopson, there to provide explanation and help answer questions. I should be clear, however, that these trials and therefore the communications around them are led by the airport.

The trial is part of the Future Airspace Strategy (FAS), a wide programme looking at modernising airspace routes and improving UK Airspace efficiency. The FAS is an aviation industry collaboration, led by the Civil Aviation Authority.

Modernising the airspace system is essential for the UK and Europe to remain competitive in the global market. For this reason processes are underway at a European level to make modernisation a legal requirement for the UK and other European states by 2023. Doing nothing, therefore, is not an option – what we are seeking is the best way of introducing these new requirements in the UK.

In terms of NATS' involvement, we are partnering several airports in trialling new departure route specifications as part of our Departures Enhancement Programme, of which both CAA and DFT are fully aware. This is the first step towards systemising UK airspace and making efficient use of the very latest navigation technology, Performance Based Navigation (PBN).

The DEP trials focus on generating data to show the track-keeping accuracy of aircraft using PBN; this is fundamental to achieving the FAS by informing new National Standards to enable advanced airspace design.

Greater use of PBN technology makes best use of today's advanced airframe and engine capability which enable aircraft to climb more quickly, descend later and follow routes with great accuracy. This means greatly reduced environmental impact in terms of both noise and CO₂ emissions. The DEP is an iterative programme designed to inform the FAS of what is possible in terms of route placement for the future.

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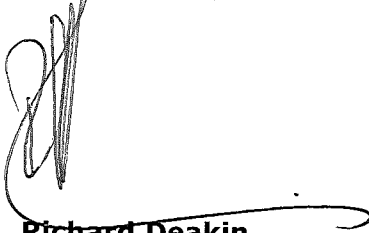
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The FAS constitutes the biggest change ever undertaken to our airspace structures, and it is today's technology like PBN which makes this kind of progress possible. They are also in line with Government guidance to concentrate aircraft noise, rather than disperse it, and to avoid areas of population.

The Heathrow trial tests the track keeping accuracy for PBN (RNAV1) which is to be mandated across the European Union; so that we can assess appropriate separation requirements for RNAV1 departure routes that diverge after take-off. The route design was approved for the purposes of the trial by the CAA and is in line with Government guidance.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Richard Deakin', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Richard Deakin
Chief Executive Officer