

Principles for the prioritisation of airspace change proposals

CAP 2541

A large, abstract graphic composed of overlapping, semi-transparent blue shapes. The shapes are primarily circular and polygonal, creating a layered, geometric effect. The colors range from a light, bright blue to a dark, deep navy blue. The graphic occupies the lower two-thirds of the page, starting from the left edge and extending towards the right, with a slight gap from the right edge.

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Introduction

The Civil Aviation Authority (Air Navigation) Directions 2023 (2023 Directions) require the CAA to publish a prioritisation principles document which contains its general approach to determining the order in which it will consider airspace change proposals (ACPs) submitted to it for decision.

This document sets out:

- When and how ACP timelines are considered by the CAA
- A description of the relevant aspects of the 2023 Directions
- The CAA's prioritisation principles as required by the 2023 Directions
- The CAA's approach when applying these principles.

Chapter 1

Background

When and how ACP timelines are considered

- 1.1 With the exception of an airspace change which is required for an urgent safety or national security reason, ACPs have historically been considered by the CAA Airspace Regulation team on a first-come, first-served basis. The Airspace Regulation team consists of individuals with skills covering a number of specialist areas including technical, economic, environmental and consultation expertise.
- 1.2 When commencing an ACP under the CAA's [airspace change process](#) (CAP 1616), sponsors are required at the outset, to propose a timeline for agreement with the CAA¹. If subsequent modifications are required, for example if a sponsor needs to pause or needs more time to complete a stage of the process, then a sponsor can submit a timeline change request to the CAA.
- 1.3 In order to ensure that the Airspace Regulation team is able to effectively manage the airspace change proposals being submitted, any airspace change timeline proposed by sponsors is considered taking account a number of factors. These include the complexity of the change and the stage the change is at, while balancing this against demand for regulatory oversight across the different technical areas.
- 1.4 Once agreed, ACP timelines are published on the [Airspace Change Portal](#).

Air Navigation Directions 2023

- 1.5 The 2023 Directions require the CAA to maintain and keep under review the Airspace Modernisation Strategy (AMS) and to consult the Secretary of State in relation to that strategy including any current or future implementation plans associated with it. The CAA must also report to the Secretary of State annually on the delivery of the AMS. The AMS is published as CAP 1711, replacing the CAA's 2018 AMS, which superseded the CAA's earlier Future Airspace Strategy.
- 1.6 The AMS lays out the overall vision for airspace modernisation by setting out the **ends** (strategic objectives), **ways** (delivery elements) and **means** (delivery plans) of modernising airspace. That vision is to deliver quicker, quieter, and cleaner journeys and more capacity the benefit of those who use and are affected by UK airspace.

¹ CAP 1616 Stage 1: At this point, the CAA will agree with the change sponsor the timeline against which we can accept the proposal, having regard to submissions by other parties. www.caa.co.uk/CAP1616

- 1.7 The Airspace Change Masterplan (Masterplan) is a current delivery plan associated with the AMS. The purpose of the Masterplan is to set out a single coordinated implementation plan for airspace changes in the UK up to 2040 to upgrade the UK's airspace and deliver the objectives of airspace modernisation at a strategic level.
- 1.8 The CAA anticipates that there will be a significant number of ACPs (with varying levels of complexity) required to support the delivery of the AMS, including the Masterplan. Accordingly, the CAA requires flexibility in how it manages ACPs, giving priority to certain proposals in order to support the delivery of that strategy and plan.
- 1.9 The CAA also needs to continue to be able to prioritise airspace changes which are required for an urgent safety or national security reason, as well as other airspace changes which are designed to achieve certain Government policy objectives.
- 1.10 The Air Navigation Directions have been updated to reflect these needs, and Direction 4.(4) requires the CAA to:

“publish a prioritisation principles document which sets out its approach to the consideration of airspace change proposals, including how it will prioritise those submitted to it for decision. That document must take into account the AMS and any associated implementation plan, the priority needed to be given to urgent safety and urgent national security proposals, and any other policy objective notified to the CAA by the Secretary of State.”

Chapter 2

The CAA's prioritisation principles

2.1 In order to meet the requirements of the Air Navigation Directions 2023 and support the efficient delivery of the CAA's AMS, the CAA will consider three orders of priority.

Priority 1 – Urgent Safety and/or Urgent National Security ACPs

2.2 The CAA will always prioritise these ACPs over all others.

Priority 2 – ACPs delivering AMS or Notified Policy objectives

2.3 Then, when required, the CAA will usually prioritise certain ACPs that support the delivery of one or more objectives of the AMS or a policy objective notified to the CAA by the Secretary of State. It should be noted that an ACP must not be inconsistent with the AMS.

2.4 How ACPs are prioritised will depend on a number of factors, including:

- a) Whether there is an interdependency between one or more ACPs which requires them to be considered in similar timeframes
- b) Where there is a need to minimise disruption to associated AMS implementation plans, such as the Masterplan
- c) Where a central purpose of the ACP is to deliver important environmental improvements in accordance with both the AMS and the [CAA's Environmental Sustainability Strategy](#)
- d) Where an ACP is expected to enable important innovative and technological developments in accordance with the AMS
- e) Where implementation of an ACP, or a technological or operational improvement delivered through an ACP, by a certain date is needed to ensure compliance with legal requirements, and
- f) If an ACP delivers an objective that has been notified to the CAA by the Secretary of State (irrespective of whether it delivers one or more objectives of the AMS).

- 2.5 In addition to the above factors, the CAA may also prioritise certain ACPs depending on the Level of the ACP², its scale and scope, and the resource required by the CAA to undertake its assessment.

Priority 3 – All other ACPs

- 2.6 The CAA will consider all other ACPs that are not a Priority 1 or 2 on a first-come, first-served basis, taking into account the resource required by the CAA to undertake its assessment.

² The CAA categorises proposals for a permanent change to the airspace design into four 'Levels' depending on the characteristics of the change. For each Level, the CAA then applies the requirements of the process in a proportionate way. See CAP 1616, paragraphs 77 to 88. www.caa.co.uk/CAP1616

Chapter 3

The CAA's approach when applying these principles

- 3.1 The CAA recognises that the prioritisation of ACPs envisaged by the 2023 Directions may, on occasions, have an impact on sponsors who have ACPs in progress.
- 3.2 The CAA will seek to minimise disruption as far as practicable to impacted sponsors by:
- Seeking to offer new dates as close as possible to those previously agreed
 - Offering new dates for gateway assessment where a previously booked slot becomes available
 - As a starting point, where we need to delay an ACP in the system, we would look to delay those that have been in the system for the shortest period of time, where possible. When we do this, we will consider a number of factors such as a sponsor's proposed timescales and the complexity of change with respect to our required resources for the assessment of the proposal, and
 - Where we need to delay an ACP, we will seek to notify the sponsor as early as practicable.
- 3.3 It is not our intent to conduct a re-prioritisation of all ACPs currently in progress, but only to prioritise when we believe this is required.
- 3.4 Where a sponsor is impacted, the CAA will confirm this with a statement on the [Airspace Change Portal](#). The impacted sponsor will then need to propose a new timeline, taking into account their own resources, for consideration by their CAA Airspace Regulation Account Manager.