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Manchester Airport starts first phase of airspace change programme

Manchester Airport has started the first phase of a two-year process to modernise the airspace around it.

In line with what is happening around the world, the Government wants to modernise the UK's airspace. This will involve redesigning flight paths around airports, as well as the upper airspace that sits above them.

The UK's airspace is among the most congested in the world and as many as one in every three flights could be delayed over 30 minutes by 2030 unless something is done about it.

Because the airspace structures have remained mostly unchanged for several decades, they do not enable modern aircraft to fly as efficiently they could.

As part of its national programme, the Government requires all airports to modernise airspace around them. This covers flights taking off or arriving at altitudes of up to 7,000ft.

The process is being overseen by the industry regulator, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) which has created a process for airspace change that all airports must follow, known as CAP1616 . The process has a series of different stages to it.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has given approval for Manchester Airport to move ahead with the process to modernise its airspace, which is set to be concluded in 2022.

The first part of that involves defining the broad and general principles that will be adopted when starting to design flight path options – this includes things like whether to try to concentrate flight paths or spread them out, or whether to try and avoid built up areas or not.

It will not be until options have been developed – which is expected to be late 2020/early 2021 – that formal consultation with the public will begin.

During the first phase, Manchester Airport is holding a series of focus groups with representatives from communities surrounding it, in order to develop an understanding of the considerations important to them.

At the same time, while not a formal consultation at this stage, any member of the public can give their views on the design principles they think should be considered. They can join the conversation by visiting <https://www.manchesterairport.co.uk/community/living-near-the-airport/futureairspace/>

Manchester Airport CEO Andrew Cowan said: “Like much of the UK’s transport system, our airspace was designed for a different era. Flight paths are not as efficient as they could be and do not allow us to benefit from modern aircraft, which have developed to be quicker and quieter, and to reduce emissions.

“The UK Government believes the time has come to modernise our airspace and has developed a programme that covers the whole of the UK. As the UK’s third largest airport, we want to continue to open up opportunities for people to experience new places, for local businesses to trade internationally and to welcome visitors from all corners of the world to see everything that is great about our region.

“We want to do that in a way that respects and enriches the communities we serve and have a long history of talking to and working with our communities and our airspace modernisation process will be no different. While we are just entering the first phase of a two-year modernisation process, with full formal consultation to follow in late 2020/early 2021, we are committed to keep people informed about our progress at all stages.”

During the course of the process, Manchester Airport is also continuing with its regular year-round Outreach programme, which sees representatives hold drop-in sessions in surrounding communities. Details of up-coming Outreach events can be found at <https://www.manchesterairport.co.uk/community/living-near-the-airport/community-outreach-events/>

Steve Wilkinson, Chair of the Manchester Airport Consultative Committee, said: “We’re in a good position here at Manchester through the community relations we already have. The team have outreach meetings that are held across the communities and that allows residents to come in and express their concerns to the airport about whatever the issue is.”

The Government published its Airspace Modernisation Strategy in December 2018. It aims to redesign flight paths for the first time since the 1960s, in order for the UK to accommodate the estimated 3.1m annual flights that will take place by 2030.

It also takes account of the fact aircraft are now equipped with navigation technology that is often not used to full effect because of the routes pilots are forced to take using these outdated flight paths.

John Mayhew, General Manager of NATS, which runs air traffic control at Manchester Airport, said: “If you imagine we hadn’t changed the roads, apart from the odd bit of junction changes here and

there, since 1960 you can imagine the congestion you'd be faced with. We now have to look at our airspace infrastructure in the same way we look at the road network so that it can be modernised to cope with demands placed on it and so that it operates in the most efficient way."

The process is being overseen by the Airspace Change Organisation Group (ACOG). A newly established body set up by the Government and the CAA to co-ordinate the programme of airspace changes across UK airports and upper airspace.

Cheryl Monk, Head of Communications from ACOG, said: "Over the next few years, our skies are being transformed to make flying quicker, cleaner and quieter while ensuring Britain remains open for business with strong, global connections. Manchester joins over 15 other airports and NATS on the process to modernise the crucial airspace infrastructure that the UK relies on."

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About Manchester Airport

Manchester Airport is a global gateway and the largest airport outside London with over 210 destinations served by 70 airlines.

Manchester's long-haul catchment area places around 22 million people and 60% of all UK businesses within a two-hour drive time – it extends north through the Lake District into Scotland; east across Yorkshire and the North East; south to Birmingham and the Midlands; and west into Merseyside and Wales.