



7th August 2020

Spaceport ACP Timeline Considerations

Dear Sponsor,

As you know, CAP1616 requires a sponsor to submit to a series of Gateways in order to progress an ACP through the process. These Gateways are defined as follows:

“A [Gateway] sign-off provides the CAA’s approval that relevant process requirements and guidance have been followed up to that point, and gives the change sponsor the CAA’s approval to move to the next stage in the process.” (CAP161 Page 21 para 65).

In addition, on receipt of each gateway submission, and within the Assessment Meeting Minutes template, we provide a formal statement that includes the following extract:

“...In conducting the gateway assessment, the CAA is assessing the process employed and its compliance with the guidance stipulated within CAP1616. It is not an assessment of the merits of the submission itself, which is reviewed at Stage 5 – Decision...”

In summary, successful Gateway sign-off merely reflects the sponsor has met the CAP1616 process requirements of that stage and is in no way a reflection of the merits or content of the proposal.

From an airspace change perspective, as things currently stand in the UK’s nascent space industry there is a degree of detail lacking below the Space Industry Act. This detail is required to inform the environmental metrics against which the spaceport and launch activity will be assessed, and to describe the level of risk / safety metrics that are required to inform the design of land, sea and air hazard areas.

The points described above may lead to a disconnect between the timelines for progressing a spaceport ACP in accordance with CAP 1616 requirements and requisite need for the publication of regulation, policy or guidance to fully inform its airspace design. Of note, a Stage 5 Decision could not be progressed until the regulation, policy or guidance had been published. Should this detail be published after the ACP has completed Stage 2, the Sponsor may find that its preferred option(s) does not satisfy the requirements described in this regulation, policy or guidance. Where this occurs, the sponsor may be required to undertake further work to address the legislative requirements.

There are two areas of work in progress that are intended to provide greater clarity to the technical requirements described above:

1. Development of environmental metrics, from an airspace perspective, as they apply to launch activity. A problem statement has been agreed with the DfT and this work is in progress; and
2. Analysis to determine whether publication of additional detail is required, as it pertains to airspace, that further describes the level of risk / safety metrics needed to inform the design of land, sea and air hazard areas; such detail would be sought from the DfT.

Timescales for the development of environmental metrics and the provision of any additional risk / safety metrics definitions are yet to be determined. Until this detail is provided, it is possible that a sponsor may be able to meet CAP1616 process requirements to satisfy a Gateway, whilst lacking the more detailed technical information required to produce meaningful outputs and informed airspace designs against the future regulation, policy or guidance.

Given the policy and guidance still under development, the Change Sponsor should consider the following as they progress through the CAP1616 process in respect of airspace changes in relation to space launch:

1. Continue according to current timeline: The Change Sponsor acknowledges the risk presented above and chooses to continue working to the agreed timeline. The Change Sponsor accepts that successful progress through one or more gateways may result in a requirement to revisit elements of their ACP, or even restart the process, should their designs fail to satisfy emerging UK Space Industry regulation, policy or guidance.
2. Amend the timeline or pause the ACP: The Change Sponsor acknowledges the risk presented above and chooses to await publication of relevant regulation, policy or guidance to more fully inform the ACP requirements. In order to do this, the Sponsor may submit a timeline amendment or seek to formally pause the ACP within the process until such time as the required information is available to enable them to proceed.

We ask that you now consider the timeline for your ACP against the information we have provided and request that you inform us of your decision regarding how you would like to proceed.

Kind regards,


Manager Airspace Regulation
CAA