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Our Ref: TCN/NATMAC

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Dear NATMAC Member

TC North – February 2009 - Update

NATS is to conduct a new consultation, on revised proposals to redraw the aircraft route map in the area of south-east England known in airspace terms as Terminal Control North (TCN). This follows detailed consideration of feedback received during our original consultation in 2008; and from meetings last autumn with local authorities and representatives of AONBs to discuss feedback and options.

The second consultation will be later this year; the date is still to be decided, although it will not be before July. The revised airspace design is still being formulated, tested in simulation and assessed for safety, operational efficiency and impact on populations.

Alternative design rules for the use of Precision Area Navigation (P-RNAV) technology, which keeps aircraft on the route centre line more precisely than today's ground-based beacon technology, and which the Civil Aviation Authority requires as the basis for all new airspace design work, means that new options for some routes in the TCN area can now be considered.

The result is that in some instances we hope to present an alternative route for consideration, to allow a degree of choice for those in the area affected. We are also looking in detail at the precise positions of the holds in the original TCN consultation and whether it is possible to include an alternative option upon which interested parties can offer a view.

We must emphasise once again that these proposals are not associated with any proposed airport developments such as a Stansted second runway or Heathrow third runway; they address existing air traffic management issues in this region. Any future planning approval for an airport development may require further airspace changes which would also be subject to consultation.

In the original consultation – which ran from 21 February to 19 June 2008 – we received 578 responses from MPs, local authorities, parish councils, environmental groups and other representative bodies. A further 14,647 responses were received from members of the public. More than a million pages were downloaded from our consultation website.

Many people were concerned that the proposal was “a done deal” and that NATS would not listen to feedback. We have been similarly clear that it was a genuine consultation and that we would listen to the views expressed; this second consultation demonstrates that we did listen and we have taken note and where possible options will be included for consideration. However, we are also very clear that doing nothing is not an option – and that the number of options available to us is extremely limited in this airspace, which is some of the most complex and congested in the world.

We will contact you again when we are able to confirm the dates for the consultation.

Yours sincerely
TCN Consultation Team