



Deputy Director Airspace, Resilience and
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Aviation Directorate

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Chief Operations Officer
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Via email: [\[REDACTED\]@nats.co.uk](mailto: [REDACTED]@nats.co.uk)

cc: [\[REDACTED\]@caa.co.uk](mailto: [REDACTED]@caa.co.uk)

16 December 2025

Dear [REDACTED],

NATS prioritisation

On 17 November 2025, the Department published the UKADS Strategic Objectives for the provision of the proposed UK Airspace Design Service (UKADS) and the proposed UK Airspace Coordination Service (UKACS). These objectives establish London's airspace as the initial focus for UKADS and highlight the need for UKACS to support modernisation efforts beyond this initial focus area.

This letter serves as a formal response to your email of 1 August 2025 and subsequent correspondence. Its purpose is to provide clarity on the broader prioritisation which NERL should follow in making plans for UK airspace over the coming decade. Outlined below are the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and Department's priorities for NERL through to 2035, including the anticipated sequencing required to achieve these objectives within the current planning horizon.

Priority Order	Prioritisation List	Sequencing
1	NAS sustainment/replacement	2031
2	iTEC implementation	iTEC V2 Scottish Upper Airspace 2029; iTEC V3 London Upper Airspace from 2036 onwards

3	London TMA including Heathrow R3	Deployments from 2032 to 2035
4	Manchester TMA including Doncaster	Deployment 2030
5	Scottish TMA	Deployment TBC dependent on timing of ACP decision and availability of deployment window
6	West (Bristol)	Incorporated into programme at an appropriate time as a smaller deployment

I have set out each of these elements in further detail below.

The CAA and DfT acknowledge NERL's position that only one significant technology/system upgrade or major airspace change can be deployed in any given calendar year. We also recognise the critical importance of NERL's technology replacement programmes - specifically NAS sustainment and iTEC implementation - which underpin the resilience and ongoing performance of the UK aviation sector.

The Government's foremost priority for airspace change is the delivery of modernised London airspace by 2035. This is essential not only to accommodate a third runway at Heathrow, but also because modernising London's airspace - the largest in the UK - will deliver the greatest societal, economic, and environmental benefits. To meet these timelines, we recognise it is vital that there is confidence in the operating model for the third runway. We trust that the Government's announcement on 25 November 2025 provides sufficient certainty needed to progress.

Based on the most recent information provided in your letter dated 1 August 2025, there is a limited window prior to the planned London deployments that allows for only one additional major airspace deployment by 2030. Should both Manchester and Scottish clusters be ready to be deployed simultaneously, NERL should prioritise the Manchester region, which serves twice as many passengers annually and would yield significantly greater benefits. For NERL to achieve deployment in 2030, all four airports within the Manchester cluster must progress in parallel. While the Manchester airports are currently advancing under a sponsor-led approach, the DfT the CAA, NERL, and the airports will monitor progress and keep under review whether (subject to the proposed consultation requirements in its Licence) responsibility should transition to NERL for delivery as part of its UKADS. We expect NERL to engage fully in determining the most effective approach for successful delivery by 2030 and note the proposed licence requirement on NERL to develop publish and keep under review its strategic delivery plan.

Notwithstanding the position that only one non-London deployment is possible by 2030, and the Department's conclusion that the Manchester should be prioritised, (with our support) the Scottish Cluster continues to advance its Airspace Change Proposals (ACPs) in case a deployment slot may become available at a later date, or that prioritisation will not be necessary because only the Scottish airports are

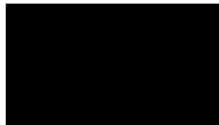
seeking a particular available deployment window. We appreciate NERL's commitment to this approach and the ongoing work to support public consultations.

We note that although the Bristol (West) cluster is identified as priority 6, given its relative scale it is expected that it can be incorporated into the deployment programme at an earlier appropriate point.

We also note that in airspace design terms Doncaster Sheffield airport sits within the Manchester cluster region and at an appropriate point will be considered as part of that cluster's work when it is in a position to participate.

We hope this clarification provides all parties with the confidence needed to work effectively towards these shared goals. We thank NERL for its continued commitment to the programme. This letter will be published on the DfT and CAA public websites.

Yours sincerely,

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