

23 April 2015
EIR Reference: E0002281

Dear XXXX

I am writing in respect of your request of 15 March 2015 for the release of information held by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), and I am sorry for the delay in our response.

Your request:

I have lived in Twickenham since 1988 and have never had cause to make a complaint about aircraft noise until this summer. Our family life was reduced to tatters after nights of disturbed sleep, directly caused by the "trials" of new flightpaths. Supposedly these "trials" have ceased and flight paths have returned to pre-trial patterns. This has patently not happened, and I now gather that this is due to the CAA implementing, without consultation of those individuals who have been directly affected, PR-NAV.

I would appreciate the following specific information:

- a daily breakdown of how many flights now have passed over the TW2 postcode since PR-NAV was implemented and a comparison of that against the flights in a comparable time period before implementation of PR-NAV*
- what plans the CAA have to deal with an aircraft emergency over the TW2 postcode*
- what plans the CAA have to deal with the impact that the implementation of PR-NAV is having on the mental and physical health of the population in the TW2 postcode*

Our response:

Having considered your request in line with the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR), we are able to provide the information below.

Background

The CAA is responsible for deciding (after due process) whether to change the notified (or published) airspace structure in accordance with its statutory duties.

Changes to the structure of UK airspace can be proposed by anyone. Decisions to permanently change the structure of airspace (e.g. permanent changes to the dimensions or classification of regulated airspace) are made by the CAA.

The process by which a potential proposer formulates a proposal that is submitted to the CAA for a decision, and the CAA makes a decision, is the CAA's Airspace Change Process which is published in Civil Aviation Publication 725 ("CAP 725").

The CAA does not implement or amend air traffic procedures.

Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSPs), the organisations that employ air traffic controllers, are responsible for devising air traffic procedures for their air traffic controllers to direct aircraft within the framework of the notified or published airspace structure. As a safety regulator, the CAA certifies and designates ANSPs to provide air traffic services in a particular block of airspace. The ANSP responsible for the provision of air traffic services in the area you refer to is NATS.

Heathrow trials

Heathrow ran a number of trials under the Departure Enhancement Project (DEP) associated with the Future Airspace Strategy (FAS). The FAS is the strategic framework that is intended to deliver a modernised airspace structure in the UK over the next 15 years and is the UK's contribution to the Single European Sky project, which is a Europe wide initiative by which the design, management and regulation of airspace will be coordinated throughout the European Union. The DEP is a series of trials to collect data to inform the case to reduce route spacing criteria and angles of departure.

One of the key enablers of the FAS is the implementation of new technology that replaces obsolete ground-based (conventional) navigation beacons with a modern GPS system. The technology is known as Area Navigation (RNAV) (or Precision Area Navigation, P-RNAV), and is a form of performance based navigation (PBN). The implementation of PBN will not only contribute to a more efficient use of the UK's limited airspace resources, but it will also deliver environmental benefits because aircraft will be able to operate using continuous climbs or descents leading to reduced fuel consumption and, therefore, the need to carry less fuel. Conventional procedures are less precise and provide less opportunity to realise these benefits. PBN will become mandated across Europe within the next decade.

The majority of commercial air transport aircraft are already equipped to use RNAV technology. However, the conversion of conventional operational procedures based on existing conventional technology to those based on RNAV technology requires the creation of nationally applicable safety standards that will apply both to the design of airspace procedures and to the separation between adjacent air routes. In some cases, these new standards can only be established where trials have been used to confirm the track-keeping ability of aircraft utilising PBN. While simulation can be used to a certain extent, only when these procedures are flown allowing operational and weather factors to be assessed can the required safety assurance for the new procedures be established.

Heathrow airport ran westerly departure trials from 25 August 2014 – 12 November 2014 and easterly departure trials from 28 July 2014 - 12 November 2014 (initially these trials were planned to run until January 2015). These particular Heathrow trials were testing:

- The use of navigation techniques mentioned above
- Resilience – shifting routes enables air traffic controllers to test different route designs with the ultimate aim of reducing separation on departures. This has the potential to reduce holding times on the ground and reduce delays on departures.
- Noise respite – the concept of providing predictable respite on departures using different runways is being trialled on westerly departures.

Specific requests for information

The use of the navigation techniques trialled by Heathrow in 2014 ceased at the end of the trials. The permanent implementation of RNAV departure routes would require an Airspace Change Proposal to be submitted to the CAA in accordance with the Airspace Change Process detailed above, which requires the Change Sponsor to conduct a stakeholder consultation.

As RNAV routes have not been implemented at Heathrow we are unable to provide a breakdown of flights over the TW2 postcode pre and post implementation or comment on the effect of its implementation.

As the UK's specialist aviation regulator, the CAA does not have plans to deal with an emergency as this is not part of our role. Heathrow airport itself would have emergency plans.

If you are not satisfied with how we have dealt with your request in the first instance you should approach the CAA in writing at:-

Caroline Chalk
Head of External Information Services
Civil Aviation Authority
Aviation House
Gatwick Airport South
Gatwick
RH6 0YR

caroline.chalk@caa.co.uk

The CAA has a formal internal review process for dealing with appeals or complaints in connection with requests under the Environmental Information Regulations. The key steps in this process are set in the attachment.

Should you remain dissatisfied with the outcome you have a right to appeal against the decision by contacting the Information Commissioner at:-

Information Commissioner's Office
FOI/EIR Complaints Resolution
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
SK9 5AF
www.ico.gov.uk/complaints.aspx

If you wish to request further information from the CAA, please use the form on the CAA website at <http://www.caa.co.uk/application.aspx?catid=286&pagetype=65&appid=24>.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Stevens'.

Mark Stevens
External Response Manager

CAA INTERNAL REVIEW & COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

- The original case to which the appeal or complaint relates is identified and the case file is made available;
- The appeal or complaint is allocated to an Appeal Manager, the appeal is acknowledged and the details of the Appeal Manager are provided to the applicant;
- The Appeal Manager reviews the case to understand the nature of the appeal or complaint, reviews the actions and decisions taken in connection with the original case and takes account of any new information that may have been received. This will typically require contact with those persons involved in the original case and consultation with the CAA Legal Department;
- The Appeal Manager concludes the review and, after consultation with those involved with the case, and with the CAA Legal Department, agrees on the course of action to be taken;
- The Appeal Manager prepares the necessary response and collates any information to be provided to the applicant;
- The response and any necessary information is sent to the applicant, together with information about further rights of appeal to the Information Commissioners Office, including full contact details.