

## Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

**Petition Number:** [PE1804](#)

**Main Petitioner:** Alasdair MacEachen, John Doig and Peter Henderson on behalf of Benbecula Community Council

**Subject:** Halt Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd's Air Traffic Management Strategy

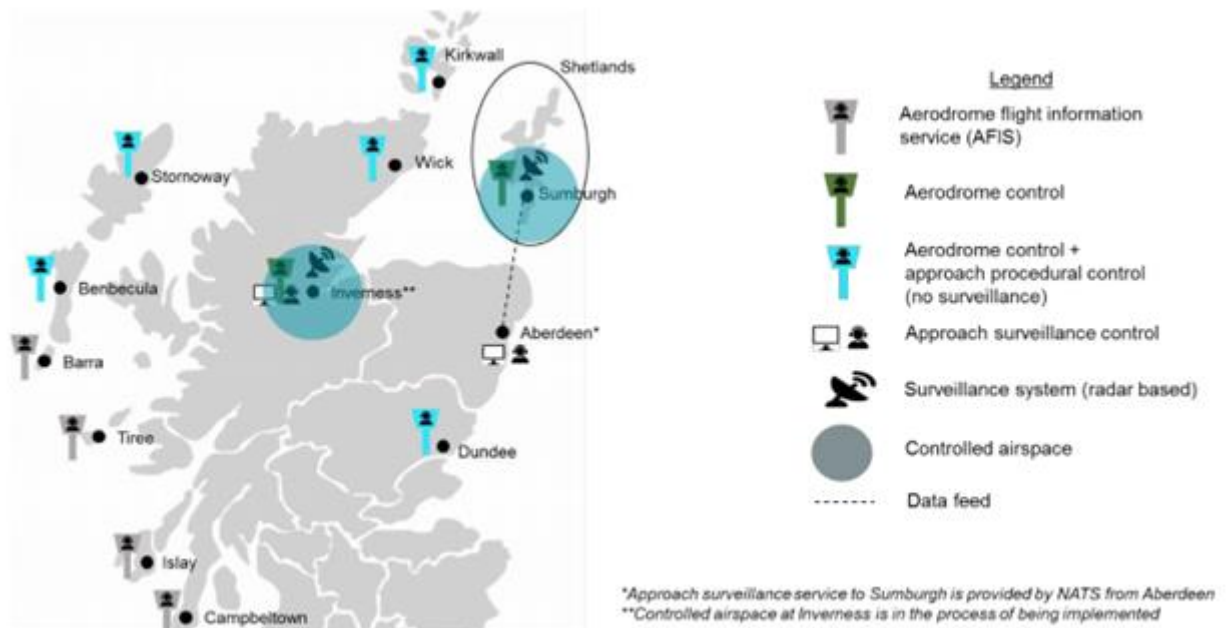
Calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to halt Highlands & Islands Airports Ltd's Air Traffic Management Strategy Project to conduct an independent assessment of the decisions and decision-making process of the ATMS project

## Background

### Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd (HIAL)

Highlands and Islands Airports Limited (HIAL) is a private limited company, 100% owned by Scottish Ministers, and is responsible for the management and operation of eleven airports, as shown in the map below.

### Current HIAL airports and air navigation services



In 2018-19, the airports under HIAL management served 1.74m passengers, with 134,094 aircraft movements.

Under the UK Civil Aviation Act, as the airport operator, HIAL must ensure that appropriate Air Navigation Services (ANS) are provided to maintain an acceptable level of safety for aircraft flying to and from the airports. HIAL itself is the licensed provider of ANS and is regulated by the UK Civil Aviation Authority.

These services can include providing information on other traffic, alerting aircraft to each other, or proactively separating aircraft according to pre-defined minimum distances or times. An airport with very low levels of traffic may only require an Aerodrome Flight Information Service (AFIS), provided by an Aerodrome Flight Information Service Officer (AFISO). An airport with multiple concurrent movements of aircraft will likely require the more stringent Air Traffic Control (ATC) service, where an Air Traffic Controller (ATCO) passes instructions and clearances to the aircraft.

ATC services can be provided in controlled or uncontrolled airspace. Uncontrolled airspace permits aircraft to fly freely without talking to the ATCO, but aircraft that wish to be controlled can do so, subject to the ATCO knowing about them. In controlled airspace, depending on the exact classification, traffic flying certain flight rules must abide by the controller clearances.

Finally, the service may benefit from surveillance (APS), giving the ATCO or AFISO surveillance information on the aircraft position and identity. A service may be provided without surveillance, which means relying on voice reporting alone, using pre-defined procedures to assure separation if a control service is provided.

HIAL has been able to maintain its operating model for ANS provision for many years, predominantly providing an approach procedural (APP) service without the benefit of surveillance in uncontrolled airspace. APP is a service where “the controller provides restrictions, instructions, and clearances, which if complied with, will de-conflict aircraft from other aircraft participating in the APP service. Neither traffic information nor deconfliction advice can be passed with respect to unknown traffic.” In other words, APP is a non-surveillance based form of ATC, which uses position reports to de-conflict participating aircraft. At the smaller airports with lower traffic levels, HIAL provides an Aerodrome Flight Information Service (AFIS) to aircraft. The service is provided by an AFISO.

HIAL asked aviation consultants Helios to [assess options](#) for the future development of its ATC service, as part of the development of its Air Traffic Management 2030 Strategy. The consultants considered four possible options, recommending that HIAL pursue a “remote tower and centralised APS option”, concluding that:

“Remote Tower and centralised APS is the only option to fully tackle the recruitment issues that threaten HIAL’s long term sustainability and the

only option to fundamentally address HIAL's aim to be flexible for airport out of hours services ensuring that the lack of access does not impede the growth potential of the region"

However, this is not without risk, as the report notes:

"The Remote Towers and centralised APS introduces substantial risks of its own which must not be underestimated. But it also offers the best answer to HIAL's strategic aspirations and the best chance of futureproofing operations. By choosing the Remote Towers and centralised APS now, a solution to manage existing risks can be phased in strategically, costs amortised over time, and lessons learnt at each phase to de-risk future operations."

HIAL announced its support for the development of this option [on 8 January 2018](#), known as the Air Traffic Management Strategy, indicating that it would be implemented over the next 10 to 15 years, with an estimated cost of £28m. HIAL state that:

"The programme will introduce remote aviation services at: Dundee, Inverness, Kirkwall, Stornoway and Sumburgh.

Barra, Campbeltown, Islay and Tiree have different levels of air traffic usage and will remain as local flight information service operations at this time. To provide an appropriate level of air traffic service proportionate to the volume and complexity of air traffic at Benbecula and Wick John O'Groats, we are pursuing a revision in the level of air traffic service to a flight information service."

More information on the project is [available on the HIAL website](#).

## **Scottish Government Action**

The Scottish Government supports the HIAL Air Traffic Management Strategy, although its development and implementation are operational matters for HIAL.

## **Scottish Parliament Action**

A [Members' Business Debate was held on Air Traffic Control \(Highlands and Islands\)](#) in the Scottish Parliament on 23 January 2020.

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July 2020

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