

# Airspace Change Masterplan Iteration 2: Co-sponsor assessment and CAA acceptance decision

CAP 2312a



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Civil Aviation Authority  
Aviation House  
Beehive Ring Road  
Crawley  
West Sussex  
RH6 0YR

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Enquiries regarding the content of this publication should be addressed to:  
[airspace.modernisation@caa.co.uk](mailto:airspace.modernisation@caa.co.uk)

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## Executive summary

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1. The Department for Transport and CAA are co-sponsors of airspace modernisation. In 2018, we commissioned NATS (En Route) plc (NERL) to create an airspace change masterplan. NERL was required to set up a separate and impartial unit, the Airspace Change Organising Group (ACOG), to develop the masterplan (as required by condition 10a of NERL's Air Traffic Services Licence).
2. The purpose of the masterplan as defined by the co-sponsor commission is to set out a single coordinated implementation plan to deliver the objectives of airspace modernisation. It will identify which UK airspace design changes need to be developed in coordination to achieve the range of benefits that modernisation can deliver, and when.
3. The purpose of assessing the masterplan (or assessing work in progress towards the masterplan) is to give the co-sponsors confidence that the masterplan commission is being delivered. Based on that assessment, and before the masterplan can be implemented, the CAA must decide whether to formally accept the masterplan into its Airspace Modernisation Strategy (AMS), having consulted the Secretary of State.
4. ACOG has proposed an iterative approach to the development of the masterplan, which recognises that different information and levels of detail will be available at different points as the plan develops. Each iteration must be accepted separately, except Iteration 1, which has already been assessed and [published](#). Once the masterplan is accepted into the AMS, together with the CAA's general duties in section 70 of the Transport Act 2000, the masterplan will form the basis against which individual airspace change decisions are made by the CAA.
5. **The purpose of this document is to set out:**
  - the co-sponsors' assessment of Iteration 2 of the masterplan
  - the CAA's decision as to whether it has been accepted into the AMS.
6. **Based on the assessment as described in this document, the co-sponsors have concluded that ACOG has provided the content required of Iteration 2 of the masterplan.** The co-sponsors are satisfied that Iteration 2 meets the masterplan commission, NERL licence condition 10a and the Government's policy objectives, and that NERL (the licensee) through ACOG has provided sufficient evidence against the relevant requirements of the Masterplan

Acceptance Criteria (CAP 2156a)<sup>1</sup> in relation to Iteration 2. Iteration 2 represents an important step towards the wholesale redesign of UK airspace in accordance with the initiatives of the AMS. Given the iterative approach of the masterplan, more information will be provided as further iterations are prepared and sponsors further develop their airspace change proposals (ACPs).

7. **After considering our statutory functions and duties, the CAA's decision, having consulted the Secretary of State, is to accept Iteration 2 of the masterplan into the AMS.** Notwithstanding acceptance, in this document the co-sponsors provide feedback to ACOG on the proposed 'cluster' approach that will need to be resolved before an Iteration 3 of the masterplan is submitted to the co-sponsors for assessment.
8. The CAA's decision to accept Iteration 2 of the masterplan means that sponsors of constituent ACPs can proceed to the Stage 2 gateway assessment of the CAP 1616 process now that potential conflicts and interdependencies between airspace changes are represented in an accepted Iteration 2 of the masterplan.

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<sup>1</sup> [Airspace Change Masterplan – CAA Acceptance Criteria \(CAP 2156a\), CAA August 2021.](#)

## Chapter 1

# Introduction

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- 1.1 The Department for Transport and the CAA are co-sponsors of airspace modernisation, which means we are working together to deliver the shared objective for the modernisation of UK airspace as set out in the CAA's AMS.<sup>2</sup>

*Deliver quicker, quieter and cleaner journeys and more capacity for the benefit of those who use and are affected by UK airspace.*

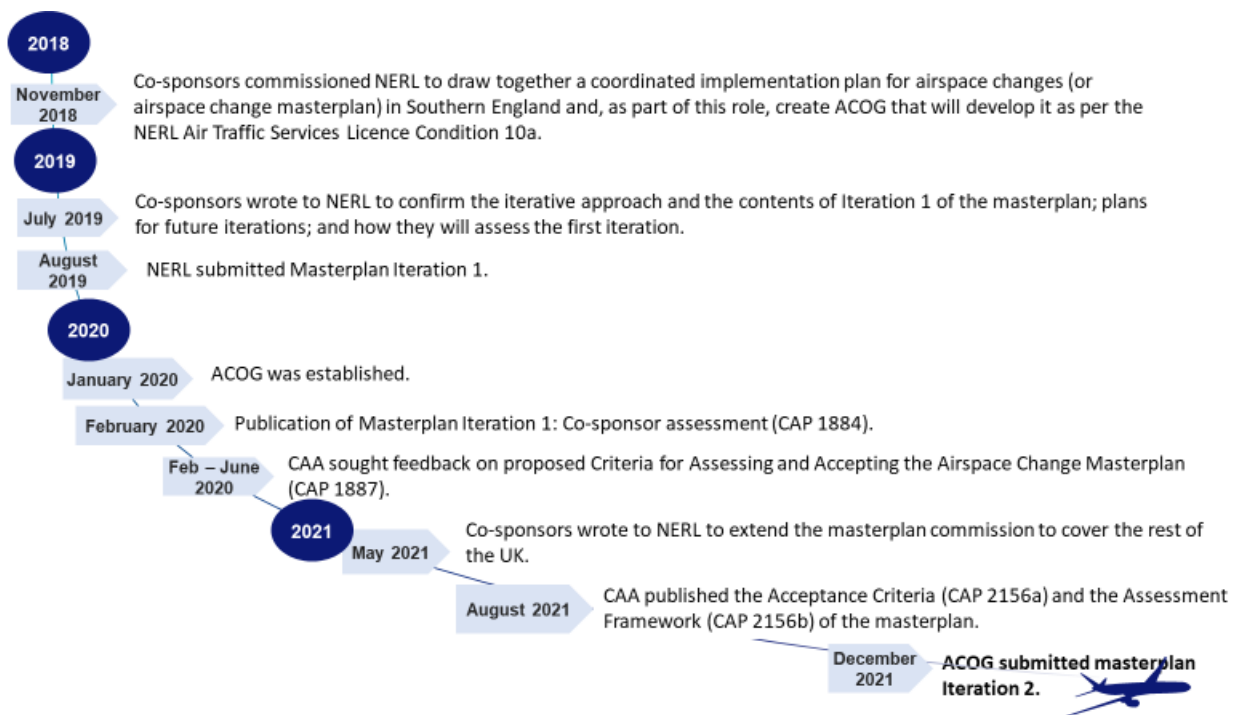
- 1.2 A crucial element of airspace modernisation and one of the most complex and challenging initiatives in the AMS is the need for airspace to be redesigned, which requires coordination among independent airspace change sponsors to manage complex interactions between airspace changes.
- 1.3 In 2018, the co-sponsors commissioned NATS (En Route) plc (NERL) to create a single coordinated implementation plan for airspace changes in the UK, known as the airspace change masterplan (or masterplan). Given the large number of parties involved in the development of the masterplan, including many airports and NERL itself, the co-sponsors required NERL to set up a separate and impartial unit, ACOG, to develop the masterplan.
- 1.4 The CAA has given legal force to these requirements through condition 10a of NERL's licence.<sup>3</sup> The strategic objectives of the masterplan are set out in a series of commissioning letters from the co-sponsors to NERL.<sup>4</sup> A high-level chronology of the masterplan commission is presented in Figure 1 below.

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<sup>2</sup> [Airspace Modernisation Strategy \(CAP 1711\), CAA December 2018.](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Air Traffic Services Licence for NATS \(En Route\) PLC \(CAP 2111\), CAA October 2021.](#)

<sup>4</sup> The commissioning letters of 2 November 2018, 30 July 2019 and 12 May 2021 are published as Appendix A to the [Airspace Change Masterplan – CAA Acceptance Criteria \(CAP 2156a\), CAA August 2021.](#)

**Figure 1: Chronology of the masterplan commission to date**

- 1.5 The masterplan will identify which UK airspace design changes need to be developed in coordination to achieve the range of benefits that modernisation can deliver (i.e. the objectives of the co-sponsors' commissioning letters), and when. Initially the masterplan commission was in respect of airspace in Southern England, but in May 2021 the commission was extended to cover all of the UK. More information on the background of the masterplan and ACOG's role can be found on [ACOG's website](#).
- 1.6 The co-sponsors assess ACOG's progress to confirm that the masterplan is consistent with the masterplan commission, NERL licence condition 10a, government policy, and the CAA's own statutory airspace functions. The co-sponsors achieve this on a continual basis and through a process of formal checkpoints once each iteration of the masterplan has been submitted by ACOG to the co-sponsors. Based on that assessment, and before the masterplan can be implemented, the CAA must decide to formally accept the masterplan into its AMS, having consulted the Secretary of State.
- 1.7 The co-sponsors may offer feedback on areas in which we would expect to see more detail, or in which we believe further work will be necessary before the CAA can 'accept' that version of that iteration or future iterations of the masterplan.

- 1.8 Each individual ACP must follow the CAA's regulatory process for changing airspace design, known as CAP 1616.<sup>5</sup> Once the ACP is formally submitted for a decision, the CAA is required to consider whether the proposal is in accordance with the AMS.<sup>6</sup> Once the masterplan is accepted into the CAA's AMS, the masterplan, together with the CAA's general duties in section 70 of the Transport Act 2000, will form the basis against which individual airspace change decisions are made by the CAA.
- 1.9 ACOG has proposed an iterative approach to the development of the masterplan, which recognises that different information and levels of detail will be available at different points as the plan develops. Each iteration must be accepted separately, except Iteration 1.<sup>7</sup>
- 1.10 This document sets out the CAA's assessment of Iteration 2 of the masterplan, as well as the CAA's decision as to whether it has been accepted into the AMS. Iteration 2 of the masterplan, which was submitted by ACOG on 6 December 2021, has been published alongside this document (see [CAP 2312b](#)).
- 1.11 The considerations and process that the co-sponsors follow when assessing each iteration of the masterplan are set out in **CAP 2156b<sup>8</sup> – referred to as the Masterplan Assessment Framework**. The criteria against which the CAA decides whether to accept an iteration of the masterplan into the AMS are set out in **CAP 2156a<sup>9</sup> – referred to as the Masterplan Acceptance Criteria**. The CAA published those documents in August 2021.
- 1.12 The assessment methodology and expectations for Iteration 2 are provided in chapter 2. The co-sponsors' assessment against the masterplan commission and the Masterplan Acceptance Criteria can be found in Appendix A. Based on that assessment, the CAA must decide whether to formally accept Iteration 2 into the AMS, having consulted the Secretary of State. The CAA's decision and next steps can be found in chapter 3.
- 1.13 Although this document provides an assessment against the acceptance criteria for Iteration 2 specifically, the requirements for acceptance of the masterplan into the AMS are ongoing and apply to all future iterations.

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<sup>5</sup> [Airspace Change: Guidance on the regulatory process for changing the notified airspace design and planned and permanent redistribution of air traffic, and on providing airspace information \(CAP 1616\)](#), CAA March 2021.

<sup>6</sup> See Civil Aviation Authority (Air Navigation) Directions 2017 (as amended), direction 5(1).

<sup>7</sup> [Iteration 1](#) has already been assessed and published. It was submitted by NERL in 2019 and was considered a high level plan.

<sup>8</sup> [Airspace Change Masterplan – Assessment Framework \(CAP 2156b\)](#), CAA August 2021.

<sup>9</sup> [Airspace Change Masterplan – CAA Acceptance Criteria \(CAP 2156a\)](#), CAA August 2021.

- 1.14      Airspace modernisation is a long and complex programme. Therefore, as stated in CAP 2156a and b, the CAA will need to update the Masterplan Acceptance Criteria over the lifetime of the masterplan as iterations are developed, which may consequently affect how the CAA carries out its assessment of future iterations.

## Chapter 2

## Purpose of a masterplan assessment

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- 2.1 The co-sponsors assess ACOG's progress in developing the masterplan to give us confidence that our masterplan commission will be delivered. Specifically, the purpose of the co-sponsors' assessment is to confirm:
- that the masterplan meets the Masterplan Acceptance Criteria (CAP 2156a)
  - that the masterplan meets the strategic objectives of the commissioning letters and complies with NERL licence condition 10a
  - whether the Government's policy objectives are being delivered
  - whether the masterplan is consistent with the CAA's statutory airspace functions.
- 2.2 The co-sponsors' focus will be on the outcomes described above and, with assistance from the ACOG Steering Committee, whether ACOG has achieved them impartially in the way it said (and told stakeholders) it would, including appropriate engagement with all impacted stakeholders.
- 2.3 Once the masterplan is accepted into the CAA's AMS, the masterplan, together with the CAA's general duties in section 70 of the Transport Act 2000, will form the basis against which individual airspace change decisions are made by the CAA.
- 2.4 In this regard, the Air Navigation Directions<sup>10</sup> state that the CAA must make airspace design change decisions in accordance with its published strategy for airspace modernisation. This means that the CAA must ensure that its decisions on ACPs as part of CAP 1616 are made in accordance with the AMS, including any iterations of the masterplan that have been accepted into it. Further information on the legal framework for acceptance can be found below.

### Assessment methodology

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- 2.5 In assessing the masterplan, the co-sponsors have reviewed all the information provided by ACOG to demonstrate compliance with the masterplan commission, NERL licence condition 10a and the Masterplan Acceptance Criteria. The co-sponsors have also checked whether the content and analysis in Iteration 2 accords with relevant government policy.

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<sup>10</sup> Visit [this](#) webpage on the legislative framework to airspace change for more information on the Air Navigation Directions.

- 2.6 The co-sponsors have looked for evidence that Iteration 2 is the product of the outputs of each ACP forming part of this modernisation programme, referred to as constituent ACPs,<sup>11</sup> contains the descriptions of the options, potential interdependencies, possible solutions and, where relevant, example assessments, and that ACOG has collaborated with the individual sponsors in finalising Iteration 2.
- 2.7 The assessment process has been dynamic, taking the form of formal evaluation (as documented in this publication), as well as written feedback on the work ACOG has shared with the CAA throughout its development of Iteration 2 of the masterplan. The co-sponsors and CAA oversight team have also been present at various meetings with ACOG as the masterplan work has been ongoing to understand the approach being taken along the way, where necessary.
- 2.8 The CAA has assessed supporting technical and operational details included in Iteration 2 of the masterplan. For example, the programme of interdependent airspace changes needed for modernisation and the identification of potential interdependences and solutions between proposals. This activity has included engagement with technical experts in the CAA's Airspace Regulation team. Whether the designs of the individual constituent ACPs are technically feasible will ultimately be a regulatory decision made by the CAA's Airspace Regulation team in line with the CAP 1616 process, and not the CAA or DfT in their capacity as co-sponsors for airspace modernisation.
- 2.9 Each iteration must include a plan for the content of subsequent iterations, which has been assessed as part of the CAA's acceptance decision for Iteration 2.
- 2.10 ACOG may wish to make a case to the co-sponsors during the ongoing assessment process that a particular element in the criteria should be moved between iterations, or omitted where it is no longer considered relevant or proportionate to the required outcome.
- 2.11 Where relevant, the co-sponsors have indicated in the assessment contained in Appendix A where further work in support of certain requirements needs to be undertaken in future iterations.

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<sup>11</sup> For additional context, constituent ACPs include those identified by NERL's Feasibility Study (confirmed by ACOG in Iteration 2 of the masterplan) as necessary to coordinate in order to deliver the objectives of the masterplan commission. NERL's Feasibility Study (2018) can be found [here](#).

## Expected content of Iteration 2

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- 2.12 The final masterplan will, in particular:
- identify where and when airspace changes are required to support delivery of the objectives of the AMS
  - identify potential interdependencies<sup>12</sup> between ACPs and the coordination of those proposals
  - identify potential conflicts<sup>13</sup> between individual ACPs
  - determine trade-offs<sup>14</sup> proposed by ACOG to resolve those conflicts.
- 2.13 The masterplan does not include the detail of individual airspace designs. The masterplan is a separate regulatory decision-making process to the CAP 1616 process applied by the CAA for individual airspace change decisions.
- 2.14 The purpose of Iteration 2 is to provide a system-wide view of the scope of the constituent ACPs and their sponsors and identify the potential interdependencies between the proposals, as well as whether other ACPs may be needed to deliver the masterplan commission. The content of Iteration 2 has been developed in parallel with the constituent ACPs and derives from the work conducted by sponsors during Stages 1 and 2 of the CAP 1616 process where applicable.<sup>15</sup>
- 2.15 Sponsors will be unable to progress to a CAP 1616 Stage 2 gateway assessment until potential conflicts and interdependencies between airspace changes are represented in an accepted Iteration 2 of the masterplan.
- 2.16 The Masterplan Acceptance Criteria sets out the content that ACOG is expected to produce in Iteration 2, which is also summarised below in Figure 2.

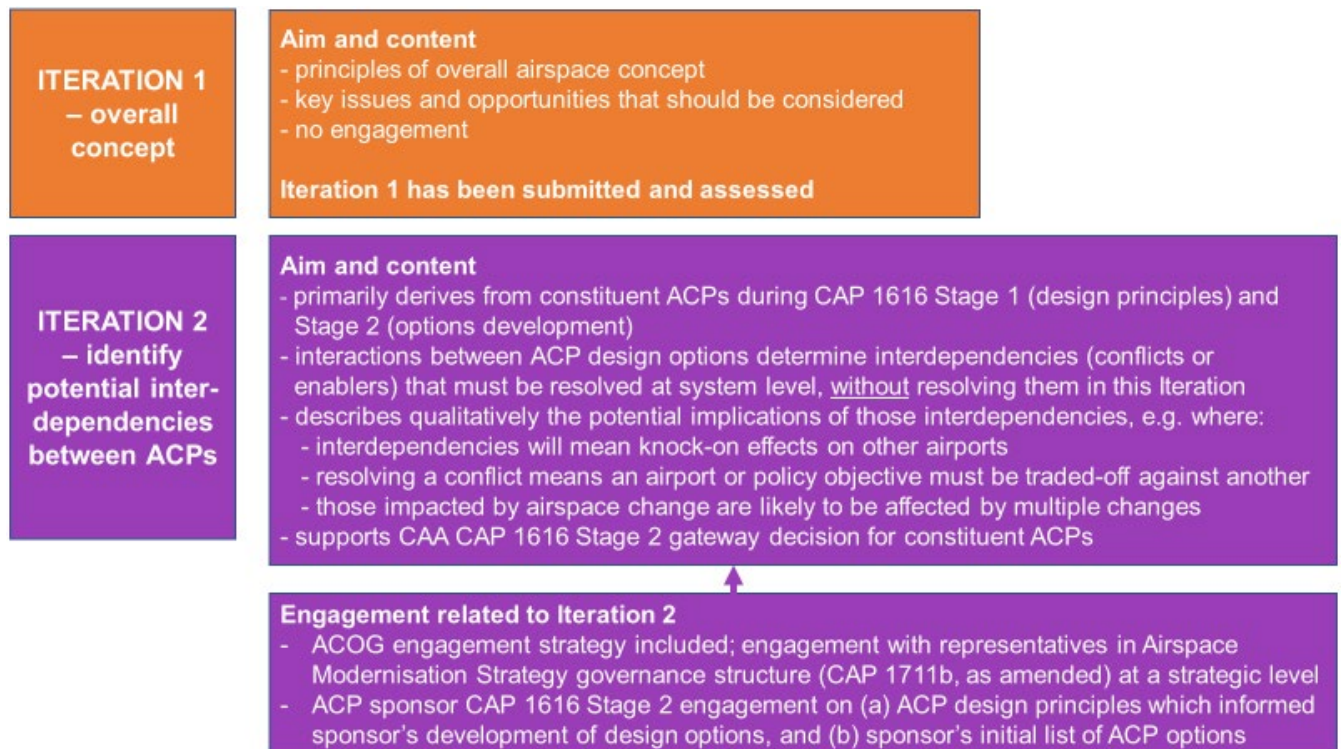
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<sup>12</sup> An interdependency can be described as two or more airspace change proposals that are linked together either because there is a potential conflict in their design options that must be solved, they enable each other at a system level, or there is a potential cumulative impact on stakeholders on the ground, or a combination of these.

<sup>13</sup> A conflict can be described as two or more airspace change proposals that cannot both proceed in their proposed form (for example, they intersect with one another in a way which is not technically possible for both to proceed).

<sup>14</sup> A trade-off is the choice or decision to resolve a conflict and could be between two sponsors of separate airspace changes, or between two objectives (such as achieving noise reduction and achieving fuel efficiency).

<sup>15</sup> That is, Stage 1 (Statement of Need and development of design principles) and Stage 2 (options development in line with Stage 1 outputs and taking feedback from potentially impacted stakeholders, followed by the first 'initial' phase of options appraisal creating a qualitatively defined shortlist of options).

**Figure 2: Summary of expected content of Iteration 1 and 2**

- 2.17 Due to its strategic and system-wide nature, any conflicts between interdependent ACPs will not be resolved in Iteration 2, but where possible will be described qualitatively. Iteration 2 must therefore summarise the nature of potential interdependencies (enablers or conflicts) between airspace design options being developed in each constituent ACP and the potential implications of those interdependencies, and therefore the potential conflicts that may need to be resolved.
- 2.18 Although the co-sponsors recognise that there will be a limit to how much detail can be included in the description of the interdependencies, we expect Iteration 2 of the masterplan to at least rank the interdependencies in terms of how challenging a solution is likely to be, and to illustrate how effective trade-off decisions between options can be made by providing example case-study assessments of the potential implications of deploying different solutions to manage conflicts.
- 2.19 To ensure that improved access benefits for different airspace users are integrated into the modernisation programme, Iteration 2 must include an assessment of the potential positive benefits or negative impacts on airspace usability.

## Legal framework for assessment and acceptance

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- 2.21 The CAA exercises its air navigation functions within the legal and policy framework set by Government. This relevant framework forms the basis of the CAA's AMS which is kept under constant review.
- 2.22 When assessing Iteration 2 and deciding whether to accept it into the AMS, the CAA is carrying out an air navigation function given to it by the Secretary of State under the Air Navigation Directions, which are made pursuant to section 66 of the Transport Act 2000.
- 2.23 The CAA's statutory duties when carrying out its air navigation functions are laid down in section 70 of the Transport Act 2000. Section 70 places the CAA under a general duty in relation to its air navigation functions to exercise those functions so as to maintain a high standard of safety in the provision of air traffic services. That duty is to have priority over the CAA's other duties in this area of work.
- 2.24 Noting that priority, the CAA's duties in relation to air navigation are to exercise its functions in the manner it thinks best so that:
- it secures the most efficient use of airspace consistent with the safe operation of aircraft and the expeditious flow of air traffic
  - it satisfies the requirements of operators and owners of all classes of aircraft
  - it takes account of the interests of any person (other than an operator or owner) in relation to the use of any particular airspace or the use of airspace generally
  - it takes account of any guidance on environmental objectives given to the CAA by the Secretary of State<sup>16</sup>
  - it facilitates the integrated operation of air traffic services provided by or on behalf of the armed forces and other air traffic services
  - it takes account of the interests of national security
  - it takes account of any international obligations of the UK notified to the CAA by the Secretary of State.
- 2.25 If in a particular case there is a conflict in the application of the material factors in section 70, then taking account of the priority of safety mentioned in 2.23 above, the CAA must apply those factors in the manner it thinks is reasonable having

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<sup>16</sup> Currently, that guidance is the [Air Navigation Guidance 2017](#): Guidance to the CAA on its environmental objectives when carrying out its air navigation functions, and to the CAA and wider industry on airspace and noise management, DfT October 2017.

regard to them as a whole. The CAA must also exercise its air navigation functions so as to impose on providers of air traffic services the minimum restrictions which are consistent with the exercise of those functions.

- 2.26 For more information on how the CAA interprets its statutory duties under section 70, see Appendix G of CAP 1616.
- 2.27 The current AMS sets out the ends, ways and means of modernising airspace through 15 initiatives that will upgrade the design, technology and operations of airspace, initially focusing on the period until the end of 2024. More about the AMS, including the latest news, is available on our website.<sup>17</sup> The CAA is also currently consulting on a refreshed strategy.<sup>18</sup>
- 2.28 In exercising its functions to assess and deciding whether to accept the masterplan into the AMS, the CAA ensures that each iteration of the masterplan is consistent with the core objectives and initiatives of the AMS. This is to ensure that airspace redesign is consistent with national and international obligations, government policy and new operational concepts and technologies, such as the integration of new airspace users.

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<sup>17</sup> See relevant webpages on the [CAA Airspace Modernisation Strategy](#).

<sup>18</sup> [Consultation on the Draft Airspace Modernisation Strategy 2022–2040](#).

## Chapter 3

## Assessment and acceptance decision

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- 3.1 This chapter summarises the co-sponsors' assessment of Iteration 2 of the masterplan and provides the CAA's decision as to whether to accept that iteration of the masterplan into the AMS. Finally, the co-sponsors set out key next steps.

### Co-sponsors' assessment

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- 3.2 The co-sponsors' assessment is set out in Appendix A and has been described under the same categories of criteria in the Masterplan Acceptance Criteria:
- A: Where, when and why airspace changes are needed, and in what sequence
  - B: Information on the airspace changes needed
  - C: Other considerations.
- 3.3 The co-sponsors have included feedback in Appendix A and identified certain areas where more detail is needed, as described in this chapter under 'Next Steps'. After consultation with the Secretary of State, the CAA has decided that these matters must be addressed in future iterations of the masterplan (under paragraph 5 of licence condition 10a) and their absence need not preclude the acceptance of Iteration 2 into the AMS at this stage.
- 3.4 The CAA is satisfied that NERL (the licensee) through ACOG has provided the information and evidence required to meet the relevant criteria for Iteration 2 of the masterplan given the status of the constituent ACPs and the level of detail currently possible.

### Assessment against the CAA's statutory duties

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- 3.5 In line with its statutory duties in section 70 of the Transport Act 2000, the CAA has considered each of the following factors material to our decision of whether to accept Iteration 2 of the masterplan into the AMS.
- 3.6 The assessment is limited to material factors as they apply to airspace interactions at the system level. This is because the purpose of the masterplan is to describe a system-wide view of the areas where airspace design trade-offs that affect interdependent ACPs are likely to arise, as well as summarising the nature of the specific design trade-offs and considering the potential solutions available to sponsors to resolve them. The CAA will assess the material factors as they apply to individual ACPs, in line with its statutory duties, when deciding whether to grant approval to a proposal under the CAP 1616 process.

## Conclusions in respect of safety

- 3.7 The CAA's primary duty is to maintain a high standard of safety in the provision of air traffic services, and this takes priority over all other duties.<sup>19</sup>
- 3.8 The AMS explains how airspace modernisation can unlock a range of benefits.<sup>20</sup> In section 1.1. of Iteration 2, ACOG has identified how, in addition to the need to increase airspace capacity, the changes to the existing system proposed in Iteration 2 are required to increase environmental efficiency, continue to enhance safety, limit and where possible reduce the impacts of overflight, release controlled airspace, improve access, strengthen resilience, and introduce new technology.
- 3.9 Section 1.1.3. of Iteration 2 describes how the features of the existing airspace system are limiting the aviation sector's ability to further enhance the UK's excellent safety record and how airspace changes can unlock safety benefits.
- 3.10 Section 3.4. describes how safety is paramount in the course of making trade-off decisions to optimise the system-wide airspace design. Iteration 3 will provide more detail on the Integrated Approach to Safety Assurance that the Programme will develop to systematically reduce and where possible remove safety risk factors as part of airspace modernisation.
- 3.11 At this early stage of the programme, it is not possible to conclude the system-wide impact of the masterplan on maintaining a high level of safety. However, the CAA is satisfied that Iteration 2 has sufficiently described the overriding priority of maintaining a high level of safety in the application of trade-off decisions and overall airspace design under the masterplan, consistent with our statutory duty in section 70(1) of the Transport Act 2000.

## Conclusions in respect of securing the most efficient use of airspace

- 3.12 The CAA has a duty to secure the most efficient use of airspace consistent with the safe operation of aircraft and the expeditious flow of air traffic.<sup>21</sup>
- 3.13 As explained in Appendix G of CAP 1616, the CAA uses the following overall definition of "the most efficient use of airspace": The most aircraft movements through a given volume of airspace over a period of time in order to make the best use of the limited resource of UK airspace from a whole system perspective. It is concerned with the operation of the airspace system as a whole.

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<sup>19</sup> Transport Act 2000, Section 70(1).

<sup>20</sup> [Airspace Modernisation Strategy \(CAP 1711\)](#). See Chapter 1 for the context on airspace modernisation.

<sup>21</sup> Transport Act 2000, Section 70(2)(a).