EUROCONTROL’S FIVE MILLIONTH FLIGHT

Early in May EUROCONTROL’s Maastricht Upper Area Control Centre (MUAC) controlled its five millionth flight – KLM 577 from Amsterdam to Abuja, Nigeria – with its trajectory-based flight data processing system (FDPS), introduced in December 2008. The crew were informed of this milestone in the use of MUAC’s state-of-the-art technology which allows it to control over 5,000 flights on a busy day.

MUAC’s FDPS provides a landmark technology base for efficient cross-border air navigation services in one of Europe’s busiest and most complex airspaces, requiring system performance of the highest standards. Together with its advanced operational tools, MUAC can rely on a wide range of integrated capabilities which are unique in the air traffic management business. Each year over 1.5 million flights are controlled at MUAC.

About MUAC

The Maastricht Upper Area Control Centre (MUAC), operated by EUROCONTROL on behalf of four States, provides air traffic control for the upper airspace (above 24,500 feet, i.e. approximately 7,500 metres) of Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and north-west Germany. The international area of responsibility it covers is a perfect example of the harmonisation of airspace and a model for cross-border projects in the spirit of the Single European Sky.

The airspace is organised on a European rather than a national basis, according to the operational requirements of traffic flows. Today, such large-scale multinational airspace is said to be unique in Europe. It is a perfect example of functional airspace integration, leading to major safety and efficiency gains.

Located either above or close to the four major international hubs of Paris, Amsterdam, Frankfurt and London as well as other key terminal areas, MUAC airspace is one of the busiest in Europe, with a complex structure and a significant portion of climbing and descending traffic.

For several years in a row, MUAC has been rated as one of the most cost-effective air navigation service providers in Europe with by far the highest controller productivity. Together with its civil and military partners in Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland, MUAC is currently working on the creation of the Functional Airspace Block Europe Central (FABEC), which aims to implement seamless air traffic management in the core area of Europe. MUAC, the functional airspace block at the heart of Europe, covers 55% of European air traffic.
Some 1.5 million flights pass through MUAC’s area of responsibility each year, making it the second busiest air traffic control centre in Europe in terms of traffic. During the summer, there can be as many as 5,000 flights per day. Over the past ten years, air traffic has increased by 29%, while unit costs have decreased by 44% and delays by 96%.

Currently, 99.7% of the aircraft travelling through MUAC airspace enjoy a delay-free service.

The core area of Europe is one of the densest and most complex airspaces in the world.

Slight air traffic decline…

It has been reported by EUROCONTROL that European flights are expected to decline by 1.3% in 2012. The first three months of 2012 saw a total of 2.12 million flights in Europe. This is a decrease of 3.3% on the first three months of 2011, after allowing for the leap year. The busiest day so far this year was Friday 30th March when there were 28,746 flights.

As mentioned by Jacques Dopagne, Director Network Management, “the decrease is bigger than the 1.3% decline forecast by EUROCONTROL for 2012 as a whole. A weak start to the year was forecast, and indeed within Europe flights are very close to forecast, but the recovery of traffic to and from North Africa is slightly slower than expected, leaving traffic for the quarter slightly below forecast overall”.

…and delays

For the first three months of 2012, the average departure delay per flight from all causes was 9.5 minutes, with 54% being primary delays and 46% reactionary delays carried over from earlier flights of the same aircraft. Airlines reported that primary delays were 51% due to airlines, 20% for weather, 15% for airport 4% en-route ATFM with the remaining 10% being attributable to security/immigration and miscellaneous causes.

A particular improvement was that airlines reported en-route ATFM delay per flight decreased by 41% to 0.2 minutes in Q1 2012 from 0.4 minutes in Q1 2011.