

## **PE1804/DD**

Petitioner submission of 1 December 2020

Zombie projects exist in business and are no joke. The HIAL ATMS project seems to meet the following definition of one as I believe it: Cannot deliver on its initial promise, sucks up resources, wears out staff, never gets reviewed despite mounting cost and causes damage throughout the company that commissioned it.

The ATMS Project when first proposed promised to deliver a solution to ATC recruitment and retention problems, improve safety, implement Controlled Airspace at 6 airports and use a non-radar surveillance system to detect aircraft in flight. Centralising all Air Traffic Services to Inverness using a Remote Towers and Surveillance Centre would future proof operations and be a long-term opportunity to save money.

So where are we 3 years on?

### **Controlled airspace**

HIAL managers told staff that they wanted Class D airspace<sup>1</sup> at all their ATC units as it ensures control of aircraft within it. Inverness started their application for Class D airspace in 2013. They quietly suspended it in 2018 yet still publicly say approval is imminent. My hunch is that refusal of Class D airspace, the likely outcome, would undermine the ATMS project.

London Oxford recently downgraded their Class D application to Class E and Transponder Mandatory Zones as it was achievable. Class E airspace is less restrictive, (so less safe), than Class D. HIAL Board minutes say that Class E airspace and Transponder Mandatory Zones will be applied to future HIAL Controlled Airspace applications.

Class E controlled airspace cannot be used for Aerodrome Control Zones, only for airspace above them. The airports will still be in Class G, unrestricted airspace but will require aircraft operating in a defined vicinity to carry transponders for identification. IFR aircraft will be controlled, VFR aircraft won't. It is only slightly better than what is done now.

### **Surveillance**

As explained more fully in submission PE1804/CC, Primary and Secondary Radar were dismissed as being prohibitively expensive and difficult to implement. A novel method of surveillance was proposed instead. It did not meet CAA requirements. HIAL now have to use the prohibitively expensive system. No costings have been made public.

Using Radar in the tower, one Controller provides both an Aerodrome and Radar service. This was dismissed as a way for keeping Controllers at the airports as it wouldn't get CAA approval. HIAL now intend to use Radar in the tower at the Remote Tower Centre. No mention has been made of CAA approval.

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<sup>1</sup> Class D airspace is for IFR and VFR flying. An ATC clearance is needed and compliance with ATC instructions is mandatory. Control areas around aerodromes are typically class D and a speed limit of 250 knots applies if the aircraft is below FL 100 (10,000 feet).

## **Communications links for Remote Towers and now Radar**

Solutions to the communications links requirements are still being investigated. These solutions and costs are not public. HIAL propose only 2 Communication links. European Aviation Safety Agency recommend a minimum of 3.

## **Recruitment & Retention**

The main reason for centralising ATC services to Inverness is to solve recruitment and retention issues. 66% of existing staff are unwilling to move from their communities.

Inverness has a no better record of recruitment and retention than any other HIAL airport and has suffered frequent restrictions to their Radar Service because of short staffing.

I believe, however, that dysfunctional recruitment practices are at the heart of HIAL's problems. I also believe that centralisation will exacerbate retention problems, not solve them. HIAL should question why they are an unpopular employer when it comes to Controller recruitment and why they have difficulty in keeping staff.

## **Improving Safety**

Benbecula and Wick are losing their Air Traffic Control service. It is being replaced with and Aerodrome Flight Information Service. This is a safety decrease.

## **Delivering on budget**

Not the case here. Instead of implementing the ATMS at 7 airports, it will now be 5. The publicly known costs have risen significantly. The final costs are unknown.

As you can see from above, there has been little success in persuading staff to move. The ATMS project has drifted from the original aims and key communications questions are still unanswered. Costs are mounting at a time when the HIAL budget is under considerable strain. HIAL Board minutes mention aspects of the ATMS project as being paid for from within the HIAL revenue budget. Also mentioned is the need for airports to make further savings.

A zombie project absorbs money, causing suffering to the rest of the business, and does not get reappraised despite growing problems.

This seems to be the case here. The more that is spent, the harder it is to find a better way. Prohibitively expensive radar has to be introduced. Communications problems remain unsolved. Two thirds of staff refuse to move. Still it lurches on.

Yet, for those running a zombie project, their jobs rely on it continuing. This seems to be the case here, as rather than lose face, HIAL seem to continue onward, hoping it will work out.

I believe that now is the time for an in-depth investigation to be carried out by a neutral party before irreparable damage is caused to the Air Services to the Highlands & Islands.