

PE1804/W

Anonymous submission of 22 November 2020

As an existing HIAL air traffic controller I am forced to submit this anonymously.

The staff currently working at these lifeline airports are, without exception, the most knowledgeable people in the industry regarding their particular airport. This is by design. Controllers cannot simply walk into a new airport and start controlling aircraft, many months of local training, provided by local, experienced controllers must be completed before a person can start working. Each airport is too different, different layouts, different terrain, different weather patterns, different aircraft, they're all different. But we know what is best for each of our individual airports and a 'one size fits all' plan is not it. While parts of the ATMS project are very sensible, the 'remoting' part of this project does not result in ANY benefit to the travelling public, nor the airlines, nor the taxpayer that supports HIAL. As such, I completely support this petition.

The fear of change is not the driving force behind our resistance to this project - introduction of controlled airspace and surveillance services are massive changes to the status quo for Kirkwall, Stornoway and Dundee. These changes will be whole heartedly embraced by the staff as we recognise the improvements in safety that will result. But it must be made clear, 'remoting' any service to a centralised centre does nothing positive.

Around the world, developing a remote tower has the potential to introduce an air traffic service to an airport where there previously hasn't been one, or at places like London City where the physical footprint of a conventional tower building poses the airport more problems than it solves, we understand that that there are applications for the technology with will result in a net gain in the service. This is not the case for HIAL's airports. There are **no** gains to anyone other than the various consultants and suppliers who are currently circling the project looking for a handsome government project payday.

As an example of the fundamental flaws of the project. Look at Sumburgh – it already has controlled airspace, already has a surveillance service and has not had any staffing issues. The only **fact** that needs to be understood for Sumburgh is that there are no improvements to be gained, zero, zilch, nada. Inclusion in the project will only introduce new unnecessary risks to be mitigated.

Another example of the fundamental problems in this project are the downgrades at Wick and Benbecula. Anyone who has taken any interest in this project, whether they are an aviation expert or a layperson off the street, will realise that the removal of air traffic controllers at these airports is a huge retrograde step and certainly not an improvement or 'futureproofing'. Sacrificing these airports to make savings in the project is mismanagement of the tallest order. To save money on the project, the removal of the completely unnecessary 'remoting' element would have eliminated all

the newly introduced safety issues, saved tens of millions of taxpayer pounds and at a stroke removed the vast majority of staff's resistance to the project.

HIAL will tell you that a change to the status quo will only gain the approval of the CAA if it is safe. This is true. But unfortunately for the airlines and passengers, the only way to make safe the problems which are likely to arise from this, is to suspend the service. A closed airport is a safe airport after all. This is not a good way to spend millions of pounds of the taxpayer's money and will only become apparent when it is too late to do anything about it.

With regard to consultation. We had hoped that completion of the Isles Impact Assessment by an independent body would have given HIAL an opportunity to pause their stubborn march forward and rethink what they were actually trying to achieve. But recent statements from the Project Team, HIAL Managing Director and the Cabinet Secretary for Transport have all said that the IIA will not result in a review of the project regardless of its findings. This not consultation. This is ticking a box for appearances.

In the Covid19 days we now live in, the needless spending of millions to centralise all your controllers into one room looks even more unwise than it ever has. If a route to review of the project is still needed, use covid as a reason to stop a plan to centralise. Leave air traffic controllers at the actual airports where they can provide the best service.

I urge the committee to recommend a full review of the ATMS project. Get the project back to basic aims – improve the service, improve the safety and build upon the units already there instead of downgrading them.