

FABEC workshop finds wider industry participation key to vertical flight efficiency improvement

20 December 2021: The Functional Airspace Block Europe Central (FABEC) second workshop on Vertical Flight Efficiency (VFE) hosted by skeyes on 7 December presented efficiency gains in addition to opportunities for further improvement based on wider industry participation. The online event attracted 130 delegates, and brought together air navigation service providers (ANSPs), airlines, industry experts and military representatives to discuss how to optimise flight efficiency hence reducing CO2 emissions and noise.

Presentations and discussions during the VFE workshop confirmed that ANSPs and airlines have been working hard to better understand the causes of vertical flight inefficiency over the last years. Airline representatives explicitly highlighted the VFE improvements on a tactical level. While participants thus recognised that a lot has already been achieved, work must continue on topics like the centralised Extended Projected Profile (EPP) or the extension to the pre-tactical and the flight planning phases. A precondition for future advances is the sharing of data between different stakeholders. Participants agreed on a separate important initiative to develop meaningful metrics and indicators to measure performance improvements.

Interdependencies between key performance indicators were also discussed, with participants at the workshop calling for greater synergy between capacity increase and environmental improvement. For instance, shorter flight trajectories have the potential to raise capacity; better utilisation of restricted airspace leads to fewer bottlenecks and reduction of congestion; while tactical measures can lower environmental impact when conditions allow. Environmental training for air traffic controllers and improved coordination between different centres and airlines would help to deliver these benefits.

John Santurbano, FABEC Champion Environment said: “We need all stakeholders to be onboard to understand the issues and find solutions that will improve vertical flight efficiency. We know we should try to avoid flight level capping, stepped climb and descent, and route restrictions. There has to be a trade-off found in order to improve on these measures and this can be done through increased participation and common understanding of the interests of priorities of all the actors.”

The date of the third FABEC VFE workshop was announced as Wednesday 7 December 2022, with location details still to be confirmed.

The airspace of the six FABEC States of Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland is one of the busiest and most complex in the world. The majority of major European airports, major civil airways and military training areas are located in this area. FABEC airspace covers 1.7 million km² and handles over 55% of European air traffic. In 2021, FABEC ENV SC won the ATM Maverick Sustainability Award.

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