

Maastricht and Karlsruhe

Free route airspace gains ground

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Free route airspace implementation is progressing well throughout the FABEC area. On top of the 182 direct routes already available every night from 24:00 to 8:00 local time, the EUROCONTROL Maastricht Upper Area Control Centre (MUAC) today extended its service to include full weekends – from Fridays at 24:00 to Mondays at 8:00 local time. The yearly benefits expected in MUAC airspace alone amount to 1.16 million km of saved flight distance, 1,300 hours of saved flight time, 3,900 t of fuel, 12,300 t of CO₂ and 52 t of NO_x. The MUAC airspace covers 260,000 km² of high-density cross-border upper airspace above the Benelux and north-west Germany.

The DFS Karlsruhe Upper Area Control Centre (Karlsruhe UAC) is today also deploying phase 2 of the phased implementation of a free route airspace concept, now offering 144 direct routes (RAD DCT) with a focus on the less complex and dense control sectors above eastern Germany. Most of the direct routes are available 24 hours/day without any time restriction. The potential yearly benefits expected for Karlsruhe UAC for phase 1, which has already introduced 35 direct routings in June 2011, stand at around 1,450 hours flying time, 4,440 t of fuel, 14,000 t of CO₂ and 60 t of NO_x. From 15 December 2011 Karlsruhe UAC expects these potential benefits to be at least 2,900 hours flying time and 8,880 t of fuel.

Both steps are aiming at a progressive deployment of free route in the FABEC airspace. Although the implementation will take place in different phases it is expected that by the end of 2012, with the support of the military partners, a greater number of direct routes will be available for 24/7 operations in both MUAC and Karlsruhe airspace – which represents roughly one third of the total FABEC airspace. Also in 2012, the new free route airspace will be connected to similar initiatives in the Nordic countries, in the UK/Ireland and in FABCE.

Free route airspace refers to a specific portion of airspace within which aircraft operators may plan a route freely between a defined entry point and a defined exit point, with the possibility of deviating via intermediate navigation points without reference to the fixed route network. Within this airspace, flights remain at all times subject to air traffic control and to any overriding airspace restrictions.

Free route airspace is a key development with a view to the implementation of shorter routes and more efficient use of the airspace across the continent. It aims to put in place a direct route network for 24/7 operations, saving aircraft operators several million kilometres in terms of flight distance.





Direct routes which can be flight planned under free route airspace operations offer major advantages both for the operators and for the network. Some of the main benefits of free route airspace are: lower fuel carriage, less engine running time, better network and flight predictability, better flight efficiency, greater cost-effectiveness, reduced environmental impact and better air traffic management performance through more accurate traffic prediction and improved sector workload.

The implementation of a new generation of air traffic control systems in the last years in Karlsruhe and Maastricht marked the cornerstone to this new development. Those new systems, updated procedures and new level of European cooperation should enable air traffic service provider to increase capacity for the expected growing traffic demand and to improve flight efficiency.

FABEC brings together the six States of Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland, their civil and military air navigation service providers, and EUROCONTROL's Maastricht Upper Area Control Centre (MUAC). The civil FABEC ANSPs employ a total of 17,700 people. 5,400 are traffic controllers. 55% of all European traffic takes place in the FABEC area.

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