

SESAR Forum – The need for speed
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“I feel the need, the need for speed” is of course a line from a famous movie, Top Gun. And I’m sure that choosing that title for my talk this afternoon has led to the natural and, indeed, inevitable comparisons between myself and Tom Cruise.

Now I know what you’re thinking at this moment. The answer is no. I’m not a member of the Church of Scientology and I’ve never been involved with Nicole Kidman. Pity!

More seriously, why am I talking about “The need for speed”? After all, in many ways we’re way behind the predicted level of demand when the ATM Master Plan was first created. Indeed, the growth curve has moved to the right by about four years.

Well there are many reasons for speed. The first is that there wasn’t exactly much slack built into the original programme. Indeed, many felt that the targets which you heard described by Matthew a minute ago were verging on the impossible to achieve. So the dip in demand hasn’t given us a breathing space – rather it’s made the required rate of progress that little bit more achievable.

A second reason is that growth is clearly starting again – even after the volcanic ash, even after the snow, the number of flights in Europe grew by 0.8% last year. If it weren’t for those events – if cancellations last year had been at the same level as 2009 – the growth figure would have been well over 2 per cent last year. And that growth isn’t uniform. There are some parts of Europe where the growth is very rapid indeed.

The ‘most likely’ scenario in the latest EUROCONTROL latest long term forecast gives us 16.9 million flights in Europe in 2030 – that’s an increase of 80 percent over the number of flights we had in 2009. Looking at it another way, we’re still forecasting average annual growth of almost three percent.

Of course, 2030 seems a long way off into the future but of course it isn’t – not given the lead times in this industry. Indeed, two weeks ago I was at an IATA event – Vision 2050 – where we were looking ahead not just twenty years, but rather forty years, which they thought was a necessary time horizon for some of the strategic planning decisions which were needed.

Another reason why there is a real need for speed is that progress in the last few years has, frankly, not been as rapid as we would have liked. I’ll come back to this later – we need to learn from the lessons of IP1 deployment.

We also need to recognise that we are not alone. The world of ATM is not just making significant leaps forward in Europe. In the main conference, this morning, I was talking about the need for global interoperability and we had Patrick come back to that issue just now. We need to make sure that the new global standards being developed are compatible with the needs of Europe. To do that, we need to be sure that our own thinking is developed. To do that, we in Europe need to play a leading role.

So what does it mean when I call for speed? Well this is not another call for “quick wins” – although I certainly don’t want to disparage the many efforts being made by experts on a huge range of projects – and doing so very hard. There is a lot of excellent progress and many very tangible outputs, some of which go largely unsung because their importance is not always immediately evident.

If I may, I’d just like to pick out one example in an area that we at EUROCONTROL are heavily involved in – and indeed have been for several years even before the creation of the SJU.

It’s the ATM Information Reference Model or AIRM. This model provides the framework for exchanging information across the network. The first version has already been released and a second version will be coming later this month.

And this will be at the core of SWIM, System Wide Information Management, and is part of the foundation of the SESAR operational concept. Now, no-one to my knowledge has ever accused AIRM of being “sexy” but it is crucial. It’s vital for global interoperability and indeed it’s recognised as such – for example by the FAA, with whom we’re in discussions on how it can be aligned, how it can be evolved.

This project is an excellent example of the long-term nature of SESAR. Not everything will have an instant impact on ATM operations but it’s still absolutely essential work and it will drive tangible changes in the years to come.

So coming back to my theme of speed, where is it that we need to pick up the pace? Well I’m going to say what you’ve already heard – we need to improve, we need to deliver on deployment. We need to make sure that the improvements coming out of development are actually put into practice and start to yield benefits. And that means two things. We need to get the coordination right and there needs to be investment.

Now this doesn’t mean that we’re moving to a Soviet-style central command approach for SESAR deployment. I think you can identify three levels of deployment and relatively few improvements will be at the central, “Network systems” level.

Rather more will be “Regional systems” – ones that need to be synchronised and integrated with the network. Typically these will involve aircraft equipage – for example datalink.

The third level, “Local systems” includes many airport-based systems such as Collaborative Decision Making. Rather more discretionary – but there must be, of course, interoperability even at that level.

So it is clearly coordination that we need. And that should involve a range of parties. Not just the ANSPs or FABs and the airspace users but also others, including airports, regulators, military and the Network Manager – now sitting in EUROCONTROL. I mention the Network Manager in particular because it’s very clear that the ATM system of the future will be much more interconnected, much more network-focused.

You've heard about the Task Force. We're happy, we're proud to be part of that, working with the Commission on the best deployment strategy. I hope that the output of that will be found to be an essential building block in taking the right decisions, learning the lessons from things such as IP1.

The group is also looking at investment and how it can be stimulated. Because there is going to be a real need for investment over the coming decade – both on the ground and in the air. At this time of economic hardship, that's not always a popular thing to be saying. But it does need to be said. And we need to say it loudly.

Of course, that investment will have to show positive business cases and that's difficult enough at the level of the network; it can be really, really challenging when you disaggregate and get down to local level.

Indeed, we need to start communicating this message now, that investment will be necessary – not just to meet the targets in the new Performance Regime, not just to comply with the implementing rules and the new standards but principally because we have to build an ATM system in Europe that will meet the forecast demand and do it safely, efficiently and in an environmentally responsible way.

So, to seriously misuse another Tom Cruise quote “Show me the money!”

Thanks very much.