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U.S National Airspace System (NAS) Plan for Air Traffic Services Data Link (Phase 1, En Route CONUS Implementation)

RTCA DO-251
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Foreword

This document was prepared by Special Committee 194 (SC-194) and approved by the RTCA Program Management Committee (PMC) on January 11, 2000.

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? Analyzing and recommending solutions to the system technical issues that aviation faces as it continues to pursue increased safety, system capacity and efficiency;

? Developing consensus on the application of pertinent technology to fulfill user and provider requirements, including development of minimum operational performance standards for electronic systems and equipment that support aviation; and

? Assisting in developing the appropriate technical material upon which positions for the International Civil Aviation Organization and the International Telecommunication Union and other appropriate international organizations can be based.

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Executive Summary

Aviation is the fastest growing transportation mode in the U.S. and around the world. Growth in aviation reflects the increasingly global nature of our economies and societies. Aviation is a crucial contributor to the continuing growth of the most dynamic portions of the economy.

The global aviation community, acting through the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), has developed a solution to the capacity constraints it faces. The Communications, Navigation, Surveillance/ Air Traffic Management (CNS/ATM) System has been designed to provide a robust and seamless environment within which airspace users and air traffic service providers can effectively and efficiently meet the growing demand for air travel.

Growing worldwide airspace congestion is contributing to a reduction of effective system capacity and efficiency and is raising safety concerns. In this country the congestion results in National Airspace System (NAS) delays, which have a negative economic impact. Communications problems to be resolved include:

- Congested voice channels that limit airspace capacity due to reduced Air Traffic Control (ATC) effectiveness and result in blocked and stepped-on transmissions.
- Operational errors that threaten safety resulting from misunderstood instructions, readback errors, and data entry errors.
- A lack of sufficient automation support in the communications between aircraft and air traffic services that result in reduced system efficiency
- The need for a more dynamic and efficient air/ground information exchange mechanism.

Air/ground data communications has been used for over a decade by airline dispatch offices for Airline Operational Control (AOC) functions. To fully realize the potential benefits inherent in the ICAO compliant CNS/ATM systems will necessitate significant changes to the air traffic control system as it has evolved over the last 75 years. Provision of Air Traffic Services (ATS) via an Aeronautical Data Link System (ADLS) utilizing the Aeronautical Telecommunication Network (ATN) will be evolutionary. This will facilitate early delivery of user benefits as well as providing an orderly transition to the use of more advanced concepts and equipment and full integration with the future NAS architecture. This evolution will be driven by user benefits, not regulatory mandates. For ease of reading the phrase "Air Traffic Services (ATS) via an Aeronautical Data Link System (ADLS) utilizing the Aeronautical Telecommunications Network (ATN)" will be condensed to "ATS over ATN" throughout the remainder of this document.

This document focuses on the implementation of the initial capabilities of the ADLS. Baseline 1 functionality is being implemented by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), as the ATS provider in the U.S. NAS, in two phases: Build I and Build IA. Interoperability within the entire international Baseline 1 environment is critical since airspace users will be equipping their aircraft with the full Baseline 1 set of capabilities. The proposed CNS/ATM solution is a multifaceted initiative that significantly alters the relationship between airspace users and their air traffic service providers. Build I capabilities will be implemented to allow both airspace users and air traffic service providers to gain operational experience with data link. Following an incremental implementation strategy, Build IA will use the lessons learned from Build I to the maximum extent possible and implement a larger set of services in the twenty Air Route Traffic Control Centers (ARTCC) located in the Continuous U.S. (CONUS). The operational services available in Builds I and IA are described and illustrated in an operational scenario which depicts the major operational and system events associated with the services, the service dependencies and relationships, and the controller and pilot interactions with each other and their respective CPDLC human-machine interfaces. This scenario is provided in DO-250, *Guiding Principles for Air Traffic Services Provided Via Data Communications Utilizing the ATN, Builds I and IA*.

The ADLS is being developed as a joint industry and FAA effort. As such, the relationship between the organizations involved is that of a partnership, where each partner has a specific capability to develop or specific equipment to acquire. All of the partners are dependent upon each other to meet their commitments for delivering system components on schedule. Unless each partner does so, the end-to-end system capability cannot be realized and user benefits will not be achieved.

The objective is to introduce ATS over ATN that is interoperable on a global basis. The limited set of ATS messages, enabled by the FAA's Build I and IA implementations, is used between controllers and pilots within domestic en route airspace. In this operational context, data link is used to offload routine ATS messages thereby relieving congestion on existing voice communications. Use of data link for ATS communications is elective, based on the judgement of controllers and pilots. Agreement on appropriate and unambiguous operating principles underpins the development of an operationally acceptable CPDLC capability that will be used effectively by controllers and pilots.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of DO-251 is to document the aviation community consensus regarding the evolution and implementation path for the provision of Air Traffic Services (ATS) via an aeronautical data link system (ADLS) utilizing the Aeronautical Telecommunication Network (ATN) in the United States (U.S.) National Airspace System (NAS). Hereafter, for ease of reading this will be referred to as "ATS over ATN". This path addresses the context, objectives, scope, schedule and expected benefits arising from the provision of ATS over ATN. Multiple phases of ADLS implementation are planned with each phase accommodating or replacing legacy functions of the previous phases.

This is a living document that will ultimately describe the implementation process for the end-state data communication system. The plan will include the ADLS applications and services required to support free flight.

Future versions of this document will address the phased implementation process of the ADLS in all operational domains and phases of flight, address accommodation and transition issues and the development of new operational services using data link.

A companion document, DO-250, *Guiding Principles for Air Traffic Services Provided Via Data Communications Utilizing the ATN, Builds I and IA*, describes the high level principles of ATS over ATN through the Build I and IA phases of the incremental deployment of the ADLS.

1.2 Background

Aeronautical data link has been used for over a decade by the airline dispatch offices for Aeronautical Operational Control (AOC) functions. These include safety of flight-related functions such as flight plan uplinks, wind/altitude profiles, essential flight management initiation data, and take off speeds. The Aircraft Communications Addressing and Reporting System[1] (ACARS) is the data link network employed by multiple communications service providers worldwide.

In early 1990's, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) approved the use of standard ACARS data link for Pre Departure Clearances (PDC) and Digital Automated Terminal Information Services (D-ATIS). PDC and D-ATIS over standard ACARS are now available at 57 domestic U.S. airports.

Elsewhere in the world, ATS providers have implemented other services using ACARS.[2] These services include Departure Clearance (DC), Oceanic Clearance Message (OCM), and Waypoint Position Reports (WPR).

The FAA initiated coordination with industry for the continued development of ATS using data link through its Communications/Surveillance Operational Implementation Team (C/SOIT). The C/SOIT defined four packages of ATS data link functions and one package of ATS satellite voice communication function:

Package A. A joint FAA/United Airlines effort that resulted in operational approval of a limited message set for controller/pilot communications using standard ACARS for oceanic operations. Package A has been superceded by Package B.

Package B. A joint FAA, South Pacific ATS, Boeing, and airline integrated CNS/ATM system, which is identified as Future Air Navigation Systems (FANS) 1/A. It includes a more robust version of ACARS for Air Traffic Services.[3] FANS 1/A has been certified and operationally approved for oceanic data link capability that allows controller-pilot data link communications and automatic dependent surveillance. A significant number of U.S. Flag and foreign long-range inter-continental fleets are FANS 1/A equipped.