

Industry Perspective



Is it already twelve months since we were here in Madrid for the first ever World ATM Congress?

So much has happened in the last year. There are things to celebrate, but at the same time, the size of what still needs to be done has become clearer.

The theme of the Congress this year is “Delivering the Future.” I cannot think of a more challenging and more appropriate subject. For many years, regular attendees at ATM meetings will know it was almost mandatory to describe the industry as being “at the crossroads.” So often was it said that it was hard not to think we were actually on a roundabout. Now it is time to deliver our future.

The tools to do that are now at hand — the General Assembly of ICAO approved the Global Air Navigation Plan last October. For the first time we have a clear understanding of what needs to be done. That predictability is very valuable. It allows all stakeholders to plan and to look forward with confidence.

It is not a minute too soon. In the Asia Pacific region and in Africa and the Middle East, growth in air transport is booming. Air transport continues to grow in Europe and in the United States as well. Now, more than ever, we need a global system that is predictable and stable. As an industry, we need to deliver safe and efficient ATM.

In the United States, after many years of uncertainty and funding brinksmanship, Congress has proposed a steadying of the budget process, allowing predictability into the FAA’s planning. That makes NextGen planning and roll-out more assured.

Meanwhile, in Europe, focus is turning to the Pilot Common Projects, the first tranche of changes to be introduced to improve ATM delivery. In other words, attention is turning from development to

deployment. The detailed deployment process gives all the stakeholders the predictability they need in this complex process.

And that predictability is, more than anything else, what airspace users are seeking. As airlines plan their network, their fleet and staffing requirements and then their schedule, and finally their day-to-day operations, they need predictability to be able to optimise their network. They cannot do that without our delivering a clear and stable path to the future.

The underlying structure of the air transport industry is an ecosystem. Airports, airlines, ANSPs, and indeed regulators must work together. Each has their own issues and concerns, but each part of the industry is fundamentally dependent on all of the other parts succeeding for them to succeed. World ATM Congress programme reflects that reality.

For the airlines and other airspace users, ATM is a means to an end, an input into their product. That is why it is so important the ATM industry listens to them to hear what is required. The challenge for the ATM industry is to deliver performance for the airlines. Don’t just take my word for that — the COOs of Lufthansa and Air France will be at the conference, in person, discussing how best to do that with two of their most important ATM suppliers — the UK’s NATS and ENAV of Italy.



“ Predictability is what the industry needs to optimise its resources, so this is my prediction. I confidently predict that you will leave Madrid better informed, enthused and inspired by your colleagues in our industry. ”

All those requirements, and the need for predictable performance, can only be built on a steady platform of regulatory certainty. For that, we need regulators that understand the issues and are prepared to work together, both with each other and with the industry, to achieve predictable, sensible, outcomes. That makes the moderated conversation between the FAA, European Commission and the Chairman and CEO of DFS (himself a former regulator) a fascinating session. After all, delivering the right regulation will take as much dialogue and partnership as delivering any other part of the complex mix that is ATM.

Partnership is a watchword for how ATM will be delivered. In addition to the airlines, there are a number of other vital stakeholders. First, there are the airports. All the efficiency and new technology in the world will mean nothing if the runway throughputs do not change. Staff too, is equally important. The civil-military nexus is vital. Airline trade associations, staff association representatives, and people working on the very edge of the civil military divide will discuss how to work together in partnership to deliver.

Equally important are partnerships with the supply industry. The technical know-how to deliver the future airspace environment calls for experienced providers of digital communications, software specialists, surveillance, and navigation solutions to work with service providers. Ground infrastructure development is closely aligned with airborne equipage, and coordination between all these entities is necessary to deliver the future airspace environment.

On Wednesday, the conference ends, as it did last year with the question of “What might ATM look like in 20 years?” A great question and a great panel will consider the scenarios.

You are here because you want to know what is happening, what might happen and how it will all fit together. The best way to see the entire picture is to walk around the exhibition, talk with exhibitors, and network with your colleagues.

CANSO and ATCA were set the challenge to deliver a Congress built around the theme of delivery and I am sure you will agree they have done so. Predictability is what the industry needs to optimise its resources, so this is my prediction. I confidently predict that you will leave Madrid better informed, enthused and inspired by your colleagues in our industry.

Welcome back to Madrid.

Andrew Charlton
 Editorial Board, World ATM Congress
 Independent Industry Analyst & Commentator