

Fewer sectors, greater capacity: the upper airspace in western Switzerland has been reorganised

Geneva, 21 December 2009. The Swiss air navigation service provider, skyguide, has reorganised the airspace controlled from Geneva. The transition took place during the night from 16 to 17 December 2009. Air traffic was kept flowing during and following the transition at reduced capacity. The new organisation will allow skyguide to react more effectively to increasing demand in the future.

“With the new sectorisation of the upper airspace, we can provide around 10 percent more capacity than at present,” said Peter Sommer, head of air navigation services in Geneva. The additional capacity will contribute to the management of the growth in traffic forecast for the future without any loss of punctuality.

A project team of about 50 people worked on the preparations for the reorganisation of the upper airspace over western Switzerland. “We have trained our air traffic controllers fully in advance of the transition,” said Sommer. 25 people, primarily air traffic controllers and technicians, were at work during the night of 17 December. Normally, seven people work in the control centre at night.

More personnel will be deployed for the next few days and all sectors will be kept open for the full day. This is essential because, as is normal procedure for any large restructuring in air navigation operations, for safety reasons capacity will be reduced at the beginning then increased step-by-step over the coming days. “These measures mean that we will be able to avoid any significant delays,” said Sommer.

The control centre in Geneva is responsible for supervising the airspace in the western part of Switzerland. The upper airspace, which extends from 24,500 feet (around 7,500 metres) to 66,000 feet (around 20,000 metres) above sea level is divided into several vertical layers. These airspace units are called sectors. Two air traffic controllers work in each sector. Sector opening times are adjusted in accordance with traffic density.

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Skyguide is responsible for providing air navigation services within Swiss airspace and in the airspace of certain adjoining regions in neighbouring countries. The company guides the civil and military aircraft entrusted to its care – around 3 400 flights a day or 1.24 million a year – through some of the busiest and most complex airspace in Europe. Skyguide is a non-profit limited company which has its head office in Geneva. The majority of its shares are held by the Swiss Confederation. The company generates annual operating revenue of over CHF 372 million and employs some 1 400 people at 14 locations in Switzerland. Skyguide is also a member, together with its partner organisations in Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, of the FABEC initiative to create a common functional airspace block that will bring greater efficiency to Central Europe's air traffic management services and activities.
