

Exchange of electronic data between pilots and air traffic controllers: skyguide at the forefront in Europe

Geneva, 22 January 2013. Skyguide has commissioned a new electronic communication tool intended to be used between the aircraft cockpit and its Geneva and Dübendorf area control centres (ACCs). The goal is to increase capacity and improve safety in the exchange of data between pilots and air traffic controllers.

This tool – Controller Pilot Data Link Communication (CPDLC) – was integrated into the workstations of the skyguide Geneva ACC air traffic controllers on 13 December 2012, and of the Dübendorf ones on 10 January 2013. It enables controllers, using their radar screen, to give pilots instructions that are displayed in the aircraft's cockpit as pre-formatted electronic mini-messages. The tool is thus part of the automation-based approach to the air navigation systems.

Increased capacity and improved safety

Although the benefits brought about by the CPDLC are initially limited, particularly because of the low level of equipment of the aircraft, the potential is considerable. Thanks to this tool, the air traffic controllers can now focus on high-added-value tasks by being spared certain routine communication tasks that can now be performed using electronic equipment rather than through radio-based exchanges.

The expected benefits are two-fold: on the one hand, a lighter workload for the air traffic controller, which results in increased capacity; and on the other, improvements in the safety resulting from the clarity and reliability of the dialogues by data link.

Skyguide at the forefront

The commissioning of the CPDLC represents a first step in the new technology of air-ground data linking at European level. The CPDLC is part of the Link2000+ project, which is a cornerstone of the implementation of SESAR (Single European Sky ATM Research), the modernisation programme of the air navigation infrastructures in Europe.

In this respect, the Swiss air navigation services are at the forefront of technology. Skyguide is the third provider to offer the CPDLC service, after Eurocontrol in Maastricht and DFS, its German counterpart, in Karlsruhe. Moreover, whereas the European mandate is limited to flight levels above 28,500 feet (approx. 8.5 km above sea level), at skyguide the CPDLC project has been extended to all the sectors of the Geneva and Dübendorf area control centres. Skyguide also supplies more messages than those prescribed in the European mandate, such as instructions for speed and transponder code changes.

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Skyguide is responsible for providing air navigation services in Switzerland and in parts of neighbouring countries. It has 1400 employees working in 14 different locations and safely and efficiently guides around 3270 civil and military flights a day, or 1.2 million a year, through the busiest and most complex airspace in Europe. Skyguide focuses on continuous improvement, targeted innovation and creative cooperation. Together with its partner organisations in Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, the company forms the FABEC alliance, which is responsible for managing Central Europe's airspace. Skyguide is a non-profit limited company which has its head office in Geneva. It is majority-owned by the Swiss Confederation.
