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Report of the IFALPA Air Traffic Services (ATS) Committee

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SUMMARY

the ATS Committee participated actively in ICAO panel work, reviewed several emerging operational concepts, and contributed to the development of IFALPA policy in areas affecting air traffic services, navigation resilience, wake turbulence, and datalink operations. Key topics included CPDLC transfer of control, GNSS interference and spoofing, RNP VPT procedures, RECAT, cold-temperature corrections, Baro-VNAV integrity, SID/STAR phraseology, removal of NAT Oceanic clearance, and future CNS/ATM concepts reflected in the updated FATO document. The Committee cooperates with other relevant IFALPA committees, and IFATCA on topics requiring harmonized pilot–controller perspectives. IFALPA represents more than 100,000 pilots in over 100 countries, and the ATS Committee provides operational expertise supporting the Federation's global safety advocacy and ICAO standardisation work.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Committee met twice since last Conference, with meetings generously hosted by THAIALPA in Bangkok BKK, and Syndicat National des Pilotes de Ligne in Paris CDG. Both meetings benefitted from presentations of local controllers and visits to respective ATC units. Besides meetings, work and coordination takes place online.

1.2. Committee is chaired by Capt. Paul Vissers, and Technical Officer Dragana Milosavljevic runs all the Committee logistics. Usually there are around 20 active airline pilots from all regions present at the meetings, joined by some observers. IFATCA has always been highly welcome with one or two represantives attending.

1.3. 80th Annual Conference of IFALPA is held in Istanbul 23rd - 26th April, 2026.

1.4. Next ATS Committee meeting is in Singapore 26th -28th May, 2026. Second one for 2026 is planned in Montreal early December.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1. IFALPA Positions on Future of Air Traffic Operations (FATO)

2.1.1. The Committee updated IFALPA´s "FATO" document with recent policies and current "trends" of the industry. This fifth edition provides a strategic overview from airline pilots perspective of future CNS/ATM developments, covering:

- navigation resilience
- digital/remote aerodromes
- surveillance and datalink evolution
- future separation concepts
- integration of new entrants to airspace

2.1.2. The document serves as an internal guidance framework linking current ICAO work programmes with anticipated developments affecting IFALPA's technical work. It bridges high-level vision documents and detailed panel activities, and identifies gaps where new IFALPA policies or position papers may be required.serves as a high-level guide for long-term policy development.

2.2. Transfer of Control Phraseology and CPDLC

2.2.1. The Committee finalised the IFALPA Position Paper on Transfer of Control and Communication Phraseology. Due risks of incorrect frequency change, IFALPA does not support any silent transfer of control and communications in the air. The Committee has also discussed the initial-call provisions, which seems to be the root problem for frequency congestion. IFATCA´s relevant study was noted.

2.2.2. The Committee also discussed concerns regarding CPDLC acknowledgements, particularly pressure felt by pilots for instant WILCO responses. Such expectations may lead pilots to acknowledge uplinks prematurely, before f.ex. evaluating aircraft climb/descent feasibility. The STANDBY (STBY) function was noted as a possible mitigation, but not all aircraft types support it. The Committee initiated work on an IFALPA position regarding the operational use of WILCO in CPDLC.

2.3. Satellite Voice Communications for Air Traffic Control operations

2.3.1. The Committee noted that SATVOICE use is increasing in remote and oceanic airspace, but regulatory frameworks have not kept pace. Concerns persist regarding: inconsistent reliability, lack of harmonized global procedures, call-sign integrity and recording limitations, unclear prioritization of safety-critical traffic.

2.3.2. The Committee reaffirmed and updated IFALPA's existing SATVOICE position paper. Until SATVOICE meets similar performance as direct controller pilot communications by VHF, they do not support it as a primary means of communication and its use f.ex for vectoring.

2.4. SID and STAR Phraseology

2.4.1. Issues with SID and STAR phraseology around the world were noted again by the Committee. Several states have collected operational feedback and studied the topic after implementation of the "new" ICAO provisions. AEROTHAI presented survey results from four major Thai airports, highlighting persistent misunderstandings and non-standard practices in the use of "Climb via SID" and "Descend via STAR" clearances.

2.4.2. Key operational concerns included:

- inconsistent use of "Climb via SID" and "Descend via STAR", particularly where multiple altitude constraints exist
- ambiguous or incorrect use of "Cancel level restriction", sometimes issued without specifying which restriction is being cancelled
- non-standard waypoint pronunciation, including confusion between "TO" and "TWO", leading to wrong-waypoint entries in the FMS
- mixed use of tactical clearances and "via" clearances, creating uncertainty about whether published restrictions remain in effect
- lack of recurrent training for both pilots and controllers on ICAO-compliant SID/STAR phraseology

2.4.3. The Committee also noted that some States continue to use hybrid or legacy phraseology that is no longer consistent with ICAO guidance.

2.4.4. The need to review of SID/STAR **procedure design** was recognised as one of the most crucial mitigations. Particularly where excessive altitude and/or speed constraints exist, the complexity multiply the risk of ambiquity. Number of global survey results support this finding.

2.5. GNSS Interference (RFI)

2.5.1. GNSS jamming and spoofing issues are increasingly affecting more geographical areas. Reports of the industry working groups, panels and manufacturers illustrate that the risks are now widely acknowledged. Although variety of mitigations and resilence to GNSS RFI are being developed under several technical and operational domains with some urgency, the implementation of most of the solutions are years away.

2.5.2. Both IFALPA and IFATCA have already decades ago warned industry to become too reliant on GNSS applications. Joint statements have

been published by both federations, where more resilient systems for position, navigation and time source are required. Also, federations are calling for enhanced monitoring, interference detection and warn against f.ex. premature removal of terrestrial based navaids. Early 2026 IFALPA updated its Safety Bulletin with unknown and emerging impact on aircraft systems.

2.5.3. False eGPWS climb instructions due GNSS issues has been discussed extensively in the Committee. The question remains, if this false instruction could be disregarded by the pilots, and under what circumstances (ie. above FL300). Airlines have different and inconsistent practices. Apparently, there is already a case where a “pull up” instuction due to real terrain was not followed. In GNSS RFI areas some airlines recommend to switch GPS based eGPWS off, to rely on radio altimeter based GPWS. Also, there is no ICAO phraseology defined for pilots to announce ATC a climb caused by (e)GPWS instruction. This phraseology is now being developed f.ex by Eurocontrol APDSG, but the Committee has struggled to find concensus in response to this development.

2.5.4. On this issue The Committee has received timely and detailed presentations and updates by the GNSS RFI expert of IFATCA, Philippe Domogala. One of the topics have been to update the associated ICAO phraseology as a joint effort in relevant working groups like APDSG.

2.6. Magnetic to True North reference

2.6.1. The Committee noted the update of an ICAO Study Group on possible transition from magnetic to True North reference systems. It had emerged that magnetic variation tables are deeply embedded in multiple aircraft systems (weather radar, transponders, traffic systems, terrain systems), making implementation extremely costly. Only some aircraft types (A350, B777) have a True/Mag flip, but even these still require tables for correction.

2.6.2. Furthermore, forecasting magnetic pole movement is unreliable, and mixed-reference environments would introduce operational risk. The Committee concluded that while True North offers conceptual benefits, the technical and financial barriers remain substantial.

2.7. Cold Temperature Corrections

2.7.1. ICAO has published the long-awaited State Letter on CTC, as finalised by ATMOPSP. New guidance material is also being drafted to support global harmonization.

2.7.2. IFATCA’s representative to ATMOPSP, Kendrick Taylor gave a detailed and well received presentation to the Committee focusing on responsibilities of pilots and controllers in applying altitude corrections

in low-temperature environments. The presentation highlighted the need for consistent application of minimum vectoring altitudes, approach procedures and communication between flight crews and ATCOs, especially when vectoring or direct routings are used in cold conditions.

2.7.3. The Committee noted that while ICAO provisions exist, their implementation is uneven, and local practices may differ. Incorrect or omitted cold temperature corrections can reduce obstacle clearance margins and increase CFIT risk, particularly in mountainous terrain.

2.7.4. The Committee agreed that Member Associations should encourage States and ANSPs to provide clear, standardized guidance on cold temperature corrections, including published temperature-limited procedures, ATC phraseology and training for both pilots and controllers.

2.8. Barometric Integrity and Baro-VNAV Vulnerabilities

2.8.1. Long-standing concerns by IFALPA regarding Baro-VNAV integrity was discussed again as detailed analysis on the issue was presented by DGAC/DSNA France. There have been number of serious incidents with an erroneous QNH setting in Europe, including the near-CFIT event at Paris Charles de Gaulle in May 2022. It resulted in the aircraft being “approximately six feet above ground well before the runway threshold”, with multiple barriers failing to prevent the hazard.

2.8.2. A DSNA study of approximately 1.7 million approaches identified 2,269 QNH mis-setting occurrences exceeding 2 hPa – most retaining the previous setting. Other studies in Europe has confirmed similar high level of barometric risk. The Committee noted that this risk level is several orders of magnitude higher than that associated with SBAS/GBAS operations, which are designed to meet ICAO Target Levels of Safety. IFALPA´s policies advocate for geometrical path, independent of pressure and temperature, for approach procedures.

2.8.3. As a local mitigation, all airports in France are raising Baro-VNAV minimas by 100 ft at 2026.

2.8.4. It was identified that barometric integrity is influenced by systemic factors such as low transition altitudes, high workload during QNH insertion, linguistic diversity and differences between PANS-OPS and TERPS criteria.

2.8.5. IFALPA has for decades advocated for a harmonized Transition Altitude (TA) in Europe, similar to many other ICAO regions. A unified TA would reduce the risk of incorrect altimeter settings during climb and descent.

2.8.6. IFATCA representative highlighted, what it considers the most effective and rather simple solution for mitigating controller or pilot errors in altimeter-setting: the Altimeter Setting Monitoring Tool (ASMT). Recently developed IFATCA policy states that ATM systems shall include a tool that provides a warning to controllers if there is a discrepancy between an aircraft's altimeter setting and the appropriate altimeter setting. The Committee noted that harmonized TA and Altimeter Setting Monitoring Tools are complementary measures that could substantially reduce Baro-VNAV-related risks.

2.9. RNP Visual Prescribed Track (RNP VPT)

2.9.1. The Committee discussed several developments, including the recent serious incident at Nice airport where an aircraft aligned with the wrong runway during the visual segment of an RNP VPT approach and almost landed on another aircraft lined-up on that runway. Investigation is still ongoing, but there was a better lighting on the other runway, it was during night with strong winds and poor visibility, and ILS was inoperative. At Nice these procedures are often used for noise abatement reasons. Coincidentally IFALPA had issued a safety bulletin to pilots regarding challenges in operating at Nice just weeks before the incident.

2.9.2. Concerns were also raised regarding new implementation of RNP VPT procedures (e.g., Bordeaux), which use containment criteria similar to RNP AR but without equivalent training, simulator requirements, or operator approval. Generally, over the years the Committee has considered these procedures only as a cheap and easy alternative to full RNP AR procedure, and thus opposed their implementation.

2.9.3. The Committee reiterated IFALPA's existing positions and noted relevant ICAO provisions regarding RNP VPT:

- POLSTAT (2015)
- 15POS13 and Briefing Leaflet opposing "RNAV Visuals"
- ICAO Circular 359

A working group within the Committee will review whether updated IFALPA policy is required

2.10. Interval Management (IM)

2.10.1. The Committee reviewed ICAO ICAO Airborne Surveillance Working Group (AIRB) work, especially on IM phraseology and target-aircraft designation. IFALPA opposes using regular callsigns ("Flyair 123") to designate the target aircraft in IM instruction, due to risk of confusion f.ex. compared to "label" in CDTI display. Alternative ways have been discussed, like pronouncing callsigns always with ICAO alphabets ("Foxtrot-Yankee-Romeo 123").

2.10.2. IM trials in the USA by the FAA and American Airlines have been concluded, and the final report includes the operational experience and feedback from pilots and controllers.

2.10.3. Proposals from AIRB to ICAO Doc 9994 have not yet undergone inter-panel coordination (ATMOPSP, FLTOPSP). The Committee emphasized the need for harmonized phraseology and improved controller support tools for any implementation of the IM concept.

2.11. Fello'fly Wake-Energy Retrieval Concept

2.11.1. Airbus presented the Committee about their Fello'fly programme. The concept enables a trailing aircraft to position itself within the smooth updraft of a leading aircraft's wake. Operational entry is targeted in 2031–2032. Large aircraft represent only 7% of the global fleet but account for roughly half of total fuel burn and CO_2 emissions. "Formation flying" in wake-induced lift with large aircraft is calculated to provide ~5% fuel savings on sectors >2000 NM.

2.11.2. Continuous data broadcast, vortex-relative autoflight, 1.2 NM separation (≈8 seconds), automated in-flight coordination and adapted ATC procedures for pairing and splitting would be required.

2.11.3. Airbus presented a multi-stage operational concept:

- **Rendezvous:** Aircraft converge toward a predefined merge point using RTA (Required Time of Arrival) functionality to ensure precise timing.
- **Negotiation:** Aircraft exchange intent and confirm pairing feasibility.
- **Vertical Separation:** Initial vertical separation is maintained until the merge point.
- **Automatic Merging:** The trailing aircraft transitions into the wake-energy retrieval position using automated guidance.
- **Formation:** The leading aircraft becomes "N1", with both aircraft sharing responsibility for maintaining the formation.
- **Split:** Aircraft separate prior to descent or when operationally required.

Airbus noted that **rendezvous accuracy is critical** to achieving the expected benefits.

2.11.4. A TLS–YUL–TLS test flight demonstrated feasibility. Pairing opportunities are greatest on EUR–NAM, Asia–EUR, EUR–MID and Asia–NAM routes. The Committee noted the potential benefits but emphasized the need for clear ATC procedures, robust automation, and unambiguous separation responsibility.

2.12. Wake Turbulence Recategorisation (RECAT)

2.12.1. ICAO Wake Turbulence Working Group is developing amendments to P-ATM including:

- expansion of RECAT to eight categories
- provisions for landing beyond the TDZ
- drafting of Pair-Wise Separation (PWS)
- future provisions for “fellow flight” concepts

2.12.2. It was noted that ICAO has indicated that States may “cherry-pick” only preferable RECAT elements if safety is demonstrated. The Committee emphasized the need for harmonized global implementation.

2.12.3. In the absence of IFATCA representative to the WTWG, IFALPA´s representative has been very active in updating and seeking IFATCA viewpoint for the work the working group.

2.13. IFALPA Climate Working Group

2.13.1. The Committee received updates from IFALPA’s Climate Working Group, which continued its work on several topics relevant to ATS operations and future environmental policy. The group is finalising a Working Paper on Emerging Technologies, addressing how new operational and technical solutions may contribute to emissions reduction while maintaining safety and operational feasibility.

2.13.2. The Climate Working Group is also completing a draft IFALPA Position on ATM Improvements for a Sustainable Future of Aviation, examining how air traffic management can support environmental objectives without compromising safety. The ATS Committee contributed operational input to ensure compatibility with real-world flight deck and ATC constraints.

2.13.3. Additional topics discussed included:

- crosswind runway operations and safety implications of noise-abatement-driven runway selection
- the ICAO Continuous Climb Operations (CCO) Manual
- contrail avoidance strategies, grouped into:
    - technological solutions
    - alternative fuels
    - navigational/operational measures

2.13.4. The Committee noted that environmental initiatives must be evaluated through a safety-first lens and welcomed the opportunity to contribute operational expertise.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1. The ATS Committee continued to play an active role in ICAO panel work, IFALPA policy development, and the evaluation of emerging operational concepts. Several regional and local issues are also handled. Key themes included navigation resilience, datalink operations, phraseology, wake-turbulence management, and the safe integration of new procedures and technologies.

3.2. The Committee maintain close cooperation with IFATCA. Controllers viewpoint is always respected in topics of common interest. Many IFATCA representatives have direct and active contact with their IFALPA counterpart. As IFALPA´s representative Capt. Kolja Bollhorst provides excellent professional contribution to work of IFATCA TOC from airline pilots perspective.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. This paper to be accepted as an information material

5. REFERENCES

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