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AVIATION SYSTEMS PLANNING - AN APPROACH FOR THE DEVELOPING WORLD

Aviation and airport systems planning is a fairly common feature of civil aviation resource and infrastructure planning at national and state levels in the developed world. This is particularly true in the United States, and to some extent in Canada, where aviation or airport systems plans have been used to support and justify capital expenditure on airport development and on other supporting services. This has meant that some order has been brought to the process of public sector investment, and priorities established.

In the developing world the opposite is generally the case. Experience shows that an organised and properly justified approach to development and management of the civil aviation system is normally lacking. Investment in infrastructure upgrading, where funding exists at all, is often made without concern for national priorities, dictated by local political pressures, and often influenced by uncoordinated foreign aid assistance. In most developing nations the civil aviation infrastructure and operation is entirely within the domain of government, whose financial resources are often insufficient to maintain, upgrade or develop their airports, air traffic control or communications systems. Consequently, reliance is placed on outside funding, with the result that much of the investment that occurs today comes by way of international technical assistance programmes, development bank loans, and increasingly from private sector sources. With no clear national priorities, and no transparent mechanism to direct funds to those areas most in need, the effectiveness of investment in civil aviation infrastructure in countries reliant on foreign aid must sometimes be questioned. It is the priorities of the funding agencies active in supporting civil aviation, such as the International and Regional Development Banks and National Aid Agencies, that would seem to govern decisions as to where aviation system investments are made, and for what purpose. These decisions may not necessarily reflect the priorities and needs of the national government regarding civil aviation upgrading.

Recognising that a problem exists in ensuring that investment in civil aviation in the developing world is used to maximum effectiveness, in order to improve flight safety and to promote regional economic development, an attempt is now being made to bring order to the process. Both the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the various regional development banks have begun to take an aviation systems planning approach to directing and prioritising investment in the civil aviation sector.

This paper describes the approaches to aviation systems planning adopted by the regional development banks, bilateral aid agencies and ICAO in the developing world, and discusses the effectiveness of these entities in developing civil aviation.

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