

FOR GCC ECONOMY, ATC GLOBAL RAISES SOME KEY QUESTIONS

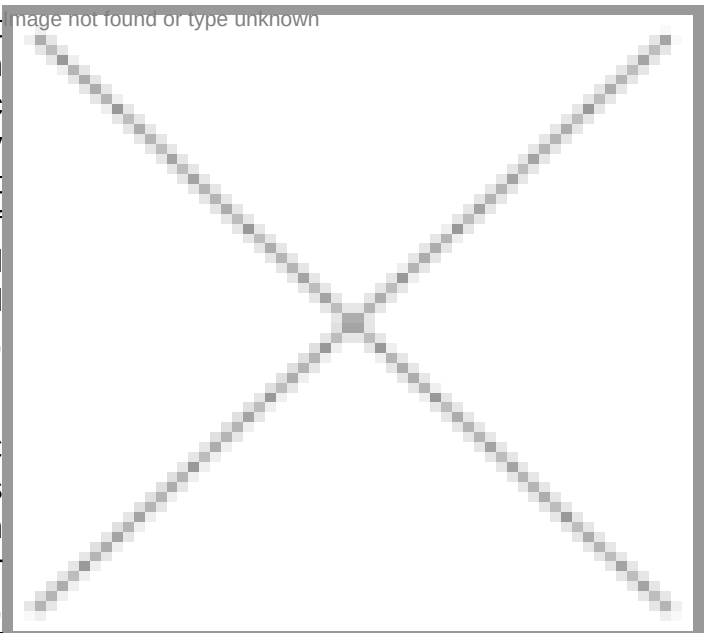
News / Events / Festivals



John Swift, Director, NATS Middle East looks at the **key** issues that will be raised at today's **ATC Global** event in Dubai.

The emergence of the Gulf, over the past decade, as the dominant hub in global aviation has been astounding. The natural geographic advantage of the region has been matched by unprecedented levels of investment in airport infrastructure, and the world's newest fleet of aircraft. The dividend has been substantial economic diversification away from oil and towards the sustainable growth of services, finance and tourism.

So it is fitting that the 25th anniversary of ATC Global – one of the world's leading conferences on air traffic management – is being held in Dubai. What might seem to the casual observer like an event for aviation geeks is, in actual fact, more like the control centre of the modern Gulf



economy. Underpinning the trade flow that supports 2 million jobs and \$116 billion in GDP for the region are the air traffic control systems that ensure that millions can travel safely, quickly and cost effectively from one place to the next.

As an industry, air traffic management is at the cutting edge of technology, but continued investment is required if the Gulf is to retain its position as the global aviation hub, and sustain the economic benefits that that position brings. A recent report released by Oxford Economics identified that Middle East airlines and passengers stand to benefit by \$16 billion over the next ten years – if investments are made in upgrading air traffic control systems.

As in other sectors, much of the most modern technology is focused on interpreting and acting on the vast quantities of data that are increasingly available on every conceivable aspect of human activity. For example, the intriguingly named 'X-Man' project is helping to reduce carbon emissions through cross-border collaboration to slow aircraft down, rather than holding them in circling patterns over airports.

Or consider Intelligent Approach, which optimises runway capacity by separating approaching aircraft by time rather than distance. At Heathrow, NATS' implementation of Intelligent Approach has reduced wind-based delays by more than 50%. For an airport that already operates at 99% capacity, that 50% reduction represents a significant economic benefit to airlines and passengers.

Over the next ten years, aviation in the Middle East is expected to grow at an annual rate of 10%. Currently, around half of Middle Eastern airspace is reserved for military flights and, since the 1950s, control over airspace has split from one regional body into six distinct national authorities. As a result of this increase in traffic, without continued investment in technology, and exploration of the optimal models of service provision, aviation congestion will increase over the next decade. That represents a significant risk to the broader economy.

ATC Global is a forum in which these kinds of issues are raised and discussed, the latest innovations highlighted, and breakthroughs in safety featured. For NATS, with its UK heritage and bases in the Middle East and Asia Pacific, it is an opportunity to demonstrate our commitment to facilitating and enhancing international transport; sharing knowledge, experience, and lessons learned; and demonstrate some of the innovations we have developed to meet the challenges being faced by the industry.

For the region, however, ATC Global's presence on its 25th anniversary has a broader significance, and one that needs to be more fully understood. It is recognition of the dominant position that the region now plays in both in the industry and more broadly in the global economy. But it will also highlight the challenges that lie ahead and the investments that need to be made to meet them.

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