

UK airspace is 'full' as today vies to be the 'busiest ever'

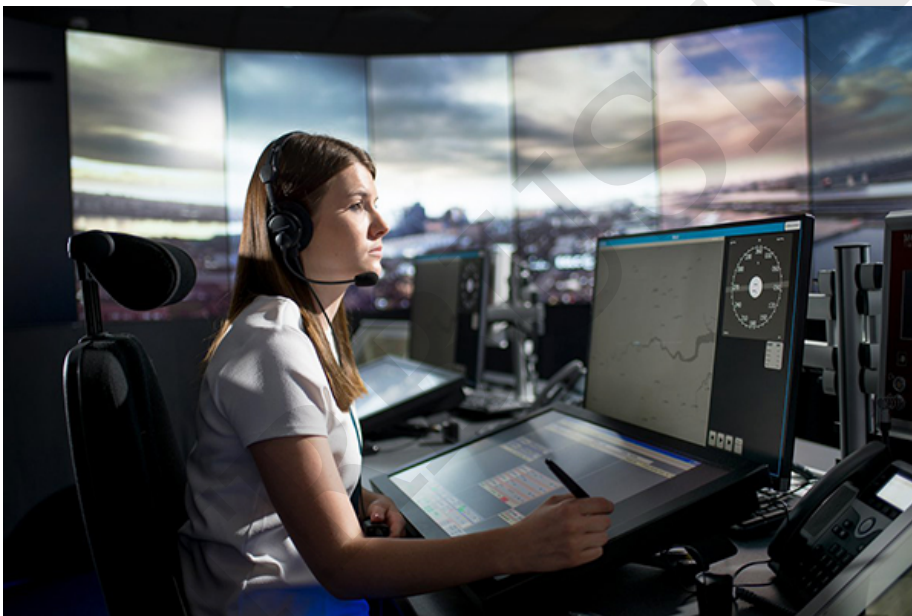
The UK's Air Navigation Service Provider 'NATS' has indicated that its early statistics are suggesting that today [Friday 21 July] could be the busiest ever recorded in the history of civil aviation, with more than 8,800 flights expected across UK flight paths.



The air traffic control public-private partnership company (*previously known as the National Air Traffic Services: 'NATS'*) told the BBC today that it expects to manage more than 770,000 flights using UK airspace this summer

40,000 MORE FLIGHTS THIS YEAR

Crucially, NATS own statistical data also points out this number is an astonishing 40,000 more than last year – in addition to higher levels of flights it is already recording over the UK across the entire rest of the year.



A NATS air traffic controller monitors flights in the control tower.

This is consistent with the air traffic control body's earlier predictions following its 2016 calendar year where it handled +7.6% more flights than 2015 – or a total of 2.45m to be exact.

This growth also comes with a warning that the basic structure of the UK's airspace is outdated since it was actually designed 50 years ago when traffic volumes were far lower. As a result, NATS says it was already evident last summer that UK airspace over South East England was operating at maximum capacity.

Looking both backwards and ahead to the challenges, NATS said in its annual report: "Historically, the growth in demand for air travel has been closely linked to the strength of the global economy and, for UK air traffic, to that of the UK, US and Eurozone economies.

MAJOR THREATS TO PASSENGER FORECASTS ARE ECONOMIC

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"The UK economy is forecast to grow by 1.9% in 2017 (source: Oxford Economics), with growth through 2017 expected to slow as higher inflation offsets some of the benefit of improved trade performance. The US economy is expected to grow at 2.1% during 2017. Eurozone economies also continue to build momentum with a weaker euro supporting stronger exports.

"Continued low oil prices have reduced the cost of air travel and are contributing to passenger demand. The Middle East market continues to grow.

"The principal risks to the forecast include: the impact on UK growth from its decision to leave the EU; the possibility of protectionist trade policies by the US, possibly outweighed by a more benign fiscal agenda; a slowdown in growth in China, although IATA's forecasts indicate strong demand for air travel there; and the escalation of conflicts in the Middle East."

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