

24<sup>th</sup> August 2023

To,  
**Telecom Regulatory Authority of India,**  
**New Delhi.**

**Kind Attention: Shri Akhilesh Kumar Trivedi, Advisor (Networks, Spectrum and Licensing)**

Sub: Response to TRAI Supplementary Consultation paper on Data Communication Services Between Aircraft and Ground Stations Provided by Organizations other than Airports Authority of India

Dear Sir,

We, InterGlobe Aviation Limited ('**IndiGo**'), write in response to the Supplementary Consultation Paper No. 12/2023 dated 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 2023 issued by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India ('**TRAI or The Authority**') ('**Consultation Paper or CP**'), on the Data Communication Services between Aircraft and Ground Stations Provided by organizations other than Airports Authority of India.

At the outset, IndiGo would like to express its sincere gratitude to TRAI for inviting stakeholder comments on the CP.

IndiGo submits that, relying on Communication Services Providers ('**CSP**') like M/s. Societe Internationale de Telecommunications Aeronautiques ('**SITA**') and M/s. Bird Collins ('**BCS**') ('collectively referred to as **Service Providers**'), to cater to the air-to-ground communications to only compliment other established voice communication channel with the ATC. These services are intended for safety, navigation and communication required for arrangements of the flight journey. Thus, it is imperative that TRAI comes out with requisite recommendation on priority, while keeping in mind the need to keep the license fee at moderate levels as that will only have ripple effect on the cost of operations. The lack of Wireless Operating License ('**WOL**') coverage by these CSPs across many airports are severely hampering the delivery of messages.

It is to be noted, that there has been significant increase in volume of traffic, which will only keep mounting further with ever increase in number of new aircrafts over Indian air space. The traffic volumes will go up many folds in times to come and having requisite infrastructure in place on ground is one of the critical elements in this chain.

Further, airlines rely heavily on 'VHF air to ground services' for various safety related features required for safe travel in the entire journey from take-off to landing of the aircraft. In view of the same, there is an urgent need for the CSPs to have PAN India coverage with requisite stations in the uncovered airports.

IndiGo requests TRAI to take into consideration the critical role of CSPs in facilitating this essential service, required by all airlines. TRAI should come with recommendations which are in line with India's moto of "Ease of Doing Business". Hence, it is requested that the license fee should be kept at moderate level in line with the best practice seen in other Asia Pacific region(s). It is recommended that, TRAI should consider benchmarking the license levies/fees by comparing license fee for same service in other neighbouring countries.

Without prejudice to the above, and as desired by TRAI, please find below our recommendations/ comments on the Consultation Paper:

**Response to TRAI's specific question:**

**SQ1. In case it is decided to bring data communication services between aircraft and ground stations provided by organizations other than Airports Authority of India under service licensing regime, what should be the eligibility conditions for obtaining service licence for data communication services between aircraft and ground stations? Please provide a detailed response with justifications.**

**IndiGo's Response:** The entry condition should be kept easy/less stringent, however considering the criticality of service only operators with relevant experience should be granted license. Additionally, we recommend that DoT/TRAI should consider allocating licenses to not only CSPs but also to airlines for their own internal consumption for the purposes of the aforesaid/similar essential services as that would pave the way for airlines to implement their own/alternate solutions for cost efficiency reasons and not be bound to CSPs for such essential services.

**SQ2: In case it is decided to auction the spectrum in the frequency range 117.975-137 MHz for Data Communication Services Between Aircraft and Ground Stations, -**

- (a) What should be the eligibility conditions for participating in auction?**
- (b) Whether the entire available spectrum in 117.975 - 137 MHz band at each airport/ ground station should be put to auction?**
- (c) What should be the block size of spectrum and minimum bid quantity in terms of number of blocks?**
- (d) What should be the spectrum cap for each airport/ ground station?**
- (e) What should be the roll-out obligations associated with the assignment of spectrum at each airport/ ground station?**
- (f) What should be the period of assignment of spectrum?**
- (g) What should be the minimum period beyond which the spectrum acquired through auction may be permitted to be surrendered?**
- (h) What should be the process and associated terms and conditions for permitting surrender of spectrum through auction?**

**Kindly provide a detailed response with justification in respect of each of the above.**

**IndiGo's response:**

- (a) The nature of service being very global in nature and very niche, only operators with sufficient prior experience and having a global coverage should be eligible.
- (b) Though the band 117.975 – 137 MHz is allocated for Aeronautical Mobile services, however it would not be appropriate for the entire band to be placed under auction, as some of these frequencies are reserved for specific use case like (tower and approach services, emergency, operational control services etc.).

- (c) In our opinion it should be done based on number of channels which would be dedicated to Aircraft Communication Addressing and Reporting System ('ACARS') and VDL mode 2 in 25 kHz bandwidth each.
- (d) Keeping in view the present and increasing traffic volumes, spectrum should be allocated.
- (e) This is best decided by Department of Telecommunication ('DoT')/TRAI.
- (f) The license should be issued for sustained period to ensure continuity of service.
- (g) This is best decided by DoT/TRAI.
- (h) This is best decided by DoT/TRAI.

**SQ3. In case of auction based and/or administrative assignment of spectrum, what should the payment terms and associated conditions for the assignment of spectrum for Data Communication Services between Aircraft and ground Stations relating to:**

- (i) Upfront payment,**
- (ii) Moratorium period,**
- (iii) Total number of installments to recover deferred payments, and**
- (iv) Rate of discount in respect of deferred payment and prepayment?**

**IndiGo's Response:** We do not support the spectrum to be auctioned, as it is an essential service concerning the safety aspects of aircraft operations. It is likely that, with the increase in license fee due to the auction method, the CSPs may eventually recover such increased costs of licenses imposed on them through their services. This will create a cascading impact on the end user of the services i.e., airlines, resulting in further increase in the cost of operations of the airlines.

In view of the above mentioned reasons and answers provided by us, it is requested that the majority Airports which are not being catered by the CSPs due to license deferment by the licensor, should be catered on priority. As it is critical considering the above mentioned reasons, that the WOL are streamlined for smooth issuance of licenses to Communication Service Providers and airlines and at a price which are comparable with the other Asia Pacific region(s). **We would also encourage DoT to issue provisional license to these service providers till they formulate the new policy, based of proposed TRAI recommendation.**

We hope that your good office will positively consider such recommendations/ comments as it will help in achieving the safety goals with affordable and sustainable air travel.

Thanking you,

**Yours sincerely**

**InterGlobe Aviation Limited ('IndiGo')**