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DRAFT COMMUNITY AVIATION CONSULTATION GROUP GUIDELINES

Submission to the Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts



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INTRODUCTION

Canberra Airport welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication, Sport and the Arts' *Draft Community Aviation Consultation Group (CACG) Guidelines*. As an important forum that facilitates the sharing of information between airport operators and the community, a revision of the guidelines is supported to ensure CACGs operate efficiently and effectively without creating additional regulatory and administrative burden for airport operators.

The Canberra Airport CACG serves as a key mechanism for distributing, presenting and discussing matters of relevance to the airport and the communities of the ACT and southern NSW. These include airport planning and operations, the implementation of the airport's Master Plan, the growth of passenger and freight services, environmental and noise management, transport arrangements and the adoption of new technologies and procedures. By providing a platform for constructive dialogue, the CACG helps ensure that community perspectives are considered in the ongoing development and operation of the airport.

Membership of the CACG reflects the breadth of issues it considers. Canberra Airport invites a range of community councils and associations from across the Canberra and Queanbeyan region, alongside representatives from airlines, businesses, tourism operators, advocacy bodies, government agencies and regulators. This diversity ensures that discussions are well-informed and that a broad range of perspectives contribute to outcomes that balance operational requirements with community expectations. In addition to regular meetings, Canberra Airport arranges site visits and guest speakers from time-to-time for CACG members to broaden their understanding of airport operations and provide additional context for discussions.

Canberra Airport supports the revision of the CACG guidelines and recognises its importance in maintaining open, constructive and transparent engagement with the community and key stakeholders. At the same time, Canberra Airport encourages consideration of refinements, as outlined in this submission, to ensure the guidelines remain practical, proportionate and effective in achieving its objectives.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Frequency of CACG meetings

Canberra Airport supports the proposal that CACG meetings should continue to occur at least three times a year. This level of frequency ensures community councils and associations, airlines, businesses and government agencies with an interest in the operations of Canberra Airport are provided with a consistent opportunity to discuss airport planning, development, aviation policy and operational matters. This regularity also enables meaningful discussion on the social and economic benefits afforded to the ACT and southern NSW due to Canberra Airport's status as the gateway to the region.

Canberra Airport recognises the importance of the CACG as an open and transparent consultative forum that allows for the sharing of information and the receiving of feedback from community members and organisations on matters relevant to the airport's operations. As such, Canberra Airport endorses CACGs meeting at least three times a year.

Meeting presentations and agendas

It is noted the draft guidelines propose that presentations at meetings from airport operators should account for no more than half of the meeting duration and that a minimum of 25 per cent of agenda items come from community members. Canberra Airport appreciates the intent of these proposals to ensure balanced contributions from CACG members, but there are concerns this narrow approach may not reflect the reality of meetings.

Canberra Airport currently has 11 community councils and associations invited to be part of its CACG. These are:

Belconnen Community Council	Pialligo Residents Association
Fernleigh Park Community Association	Ridgeway Community Group
Gungahlin Community Council	Tuggeranong Community Council
Inner South Community Council	Weston Creek Community Council
Jerrabomberra Residents Association	Woden Valley Community Council
North Canberra Community Council	

The secretariat at Canberra Airport engages extensively with these community representatives and other CACG members prior to each meeting to seek input in the preparation of the agenda and request the submission of meeting briefs. Despite these efforts to seek engagement from CACG members in developing the agenda, it is only occasional that items are submitted for inclusion. When community representatives do present meetings briefs, most provide useful insights on what is directly concerning their community, rather than matters related to operations of the airport.

Consequently, Canberra Airport management and the secretariat propose the majority of agenda items in consultation with the independent Chair to ensure the meetings remain informative. Canberra Airport representatives are therefore responsible for presenting on many of the agenda items. This approach is consistent with one of the core functions of the CACG to provide a forum for "airport operators to disseminate information".

For this reason, Canberra Airport also believes that rather than stipulating a "minimum" of 25 per cent of agenda items from community members, the guidelines should adopt a "target" of 25 per cent. This would recognise the ongoing efforts of Canberra Airport to seek input from community members in the preparation of the agenda, while acknowledging that it is not always possible to achieve this threshold given the level of agenda items currently submitted by community representatives.

Secretariat responsibilities

Canberra Airport acknowledges the importance of CACG documentation being available in a transparent and timely manner to both CACG members and the broader public. The Canberra Airport secretariat already ensures that minutes of each meeting are finalised, distributed to members and

uploaded to the Canberra Airport website promptly. No concerns have been raised about the timeliness of this process. Canberra Airport is mindful, however, that the draft guideline to publish and disseminate meeting minutes within 10 working days may be challenging in practice, particularly given drafts are circulated for comment before finalisation. It could also place an administrative burden on the secretariat, whose role extends across a number of other operational priorities. Canberra Airport recommends a best endeavours timeframe of 15 working days would be a more practical approach while also still guaranteeing timely publication.

Canberra Airport also cautions against the proposal that the details of CACG members be published on the airport website. Under current arrangements adopted by the airport, the public version of the meeting minutes are published with the attendance or apologies listing only the entity represented, rather than publishing personal details. This ensures the privacy of members is respected while still identifying the organisations and groups who are engaged with the CACG. If the draft guideline to have the details of the participating members published online proceeds, Canberra Airport requests further clarification on what consultation would be required with members to secure their consent for this information to be published and what would occur if members did not provide approval. Canberra Airport believes it would be more appropriate to continue the existing practice of listing the name of the organisation, business or government agency attending the meeting. This approach maintains transparency while continuing to protect the privacy of individuals.

It is noted that the list of information the secretariat should upload to the airport website is already contained within the final minutes of each meeting which is published online. Requiring the information to be published individually, such as the agenda, business papers and then the final minutes, risks creating considerable administrative burden and duplication. Given the Commonwealth Government's emphasis on reducing red tape and boosting productivity, Canberra Airport suggests it would be more efficient to maintain its current practice of including all of the required information in the published version of the meeting minutes.

It is recognised that the requirement for the secretariat to prepare an annual report of the outcomes of the CACG is continued in the draft guidelines. Canberra Airport appreciates the intent of this request, however, has consistently found this requirement to duplicate existing processes. The annual report just repeats information already contained in the publicly available minutes uploaded after each meeting. Canberra Airport suggests that the minutes already provide an adequate record of CACG discussions and outcomes without the need for an additional reporting layer.

Out-of-session communication

It is important that CACG members remain informed about airport activities and developments, however, it must be considered that ongoing out-of-session communication may create a culture of information overload. Given CACG meetings are held at least three times a year and are designed to "exchange information on issues relating to airport operations and their impacts", Canberra Airport suggests there needs to be reconsideration of the advice that airport operators should provide regular communication to members between meetings. Canberra Airport acknowledges the responsibility of airport operators to have an open and transparent relationship with the community about airport activities and developments, but this is the primary purpose of CACG meetings. As such, Canberra Airport believes that updates should only be provided to members between meetings which are particularly pertinent or time-sensitive.

In addition to direct engagement with CACG members, Canberra Airport communicates regularly with the community through social media, the FlyCBR e-newsletter, Majura Park Shopping Centre promotions and digital advertisements throughout the airport precinct. These channels ensure that information about airport operations and activities is shared widely with the community on a regular basis.

Recruitment of members

Canberra Airport acknowledges that at other Australian airports there have been concerns raised by community members that they have experienced barriers to participating in their relevant CACG. The intent behind the draft guideline that airport operators place an annual public call for members is therefore recognised. However, Canberra Airport does not support this. Canberra Airport already engages extensively with community councils and associations, businesses and government agencies to ensure a diverse and representative range of participants in the CACG. This promotes informed input and balanced perspectives without compromising the effectiveness of the forum.

Introducing an annual recruitment campaign would add considerable administrative burden on the secretariat, who would need to manage applications and then facilitate, in collaboration with the independent Chair and airport management, a process to determine the eligibility of applicants. It is noted that this is not addressed in the guidelines. Representatives from the 11 community councils or associations who participate in the Canberra Airport CACG are elected or appointed at their respective annual general meetings. They are a critical link between the CACG and their communities by consulting with their membership to identify agenda items and then reporting back to their councils or associations after CACG meetings. This process has worked well for many years and ensures meaningful engagement and consultation with the community. For this reason, Canberra Airport suggests that rather than an annual public call for members, airport operators continue to identify and approach relevant community groups with a clear connection to the airport's operations and invite them to send a representative. This approach supports transparency while maintaining an effective forum for the sharing of information.

Department attendance at CACG meetings

The Department is a key contributor to the airport sector by developing and implementing policy, reviewing and approving Master Plans and Major Development Plans and overseeing compliance with the *Airports Act 1996*. These matters are of significant interest to members of the community, particularly those who live within the footprint of an airport.

As the CACG brings together community members, airlines, businesses and government agencies, the Department's attendance and participation at meetings is important to delivering policy updates relating to airports and conveying government decisions on broader aviation matters. Canberra Airport previously extended invitations to the Department to attend CACG meetings, however, upon receiving advice it would not attend on a regular basis, this practice stopped. The non-attendance by the Department over the past 12 months has caused frustration among members who view the Department's input as integral to the objectives of the CACG. As such, Canberra Airport encourage its continued participation in CACG meetings.

With the impending establishment of the Aviation Consumer Ombudsman and the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman through the Aviation Ombuds Office, Canberra Airport also believes it is necessary to consider their inclusion in the draft guidelines to ensure representation from these bodies at CACG meetings. This would support the sharing of information with the community on aviation complaints, both consumer-related and aircraft noise-related.

CACG Chair forums

Canberra Airport wishes to highlight the value of the former annual forums where independent CACG Chairs came together to share ideas, gain perspective and learn from each other's experiences. Canberra Airport supports the resumption of these forums as they played an important role in building capability, consistency and shared understanding across CACGs nationally. Reinstating such forums would directly support the objectives of the draft guidelines by fostering best practice, strengthening the role of independent Chairs and ultimately improving the effectiveness and credibility of CACGs.

CONCLUSION

Canberra Airport appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft guidelines. The CACG plays a central role in facilitating open, constructive and transparent dialogue between airport operators, community representatives and government agencies. Canberra Airport encourages the Department to consider the refinements outlined in this submission to ensure the draft guidelines remain practical and proportionate, minimise unnecessary administrative burden and continue to support meaningful consultation and collaboration with the community.

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