



**Martin Rolfe**  
CEO NATS

# INVITED FOREWORD: NATS

This has been a year like no other for aviation across the globe. I never expected in my lifetime to see pictures of parked aircraft and empty airports, or international travel being made illegal.

Traffic levels are still around 75% down on 2019 and industry forecasts for a full recovery vary from two to five years, so the uncertainty continues. In March, NATS recorded its first day of zero westbound North Atlantic tracks for the first time in decades, and international aviation has been pretty much shut down for over a year.

A degree of recovery was expected this summer and we committed to our customers that our operation would be ready to handle much more normal levels of traffic. While the Government's "traffic lights" system hasn't offered travellers many options up to now, it has now added "green watch" destinations and there is hope that "double vaccers" may be spared quarantine later in the summer, which gives the industry hope that the critical summer season may yet come good, albeit much later than usual.

Despite the ongoing impact of the pandemic on our industry, there is much to be optimistic about, and there has never been a better time to recalibrate and change our collective mindset to do things differently in the future. I'm very clear that as demands change, so must our response. More than ever, now is the time for our industry to find new ways of working and dispense with old habits. New answers need a new mindset, especially to address the environmental challenge, so that we can build in solutions as traffic returns.

Over the past year, the decline in air traffic has meant that NATS had no delay and exceeded its environmental performance targets. As traffic returns that will be tougher to maintain, but sustainability has become a key focus of the global industry restart. The UK government has announced that decarbonising aviation is a top priority and the UK aviation industry has committed to reach net zero emissions by 2050.

As part of our net zero aspirations, we need to find new and sustainable ways of managing our airspace. Modernising airspace remains our top investment priority because our customers know the benefits it can deliver – and while traffic levels are depressed, it is a good time for us to crack on with network-level change. The ultimate objective is to simplify the way aircraft can navigate congested lower airspace, reducing the need for tactical air traffic control interventions, and in less congested upper airspace, giving pilots the freedom to plan their own routes and only put in constraints when necessary for safety.

There are many new technologies and tools coming through that will help deliver these projects. But the future will bring new users like drones, super-fast jets, even space travel, which requires us as an industry to think differently. It also requires ATM service providers such as NATS to be willing to explore beyond the traditional stereotypes of what we're there to do. Our legislators and regulators too, must be able to keep pace – real pace – with these developments. They have to be able to see what's coming, and be prepared, so that innovation is not held back. Regulation will be necessary, but it must be timely, and as light touch as possible.

It is as an industry working collaboratively together that we will find the best means of making the real difference to our future. **S**

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Martin Rolfe was born in 1972. He studied engineering at the University of Southampton and graduated with a Master's Degree in Aerospace Systems Engineering. Martin started his professional career with the European Space Agency working in orbital mechanics. He held a number of engineering leadership roles within Lockheed Martin both in the UK and US between 1998 and 2009 leading large multinational teams in ATM engineering operations. This included leading the team of engineers working on the technical integration and delivery of the NATS Swanwick En Route Centre, which transitioned into operation from its West Drayton Centre in 2002. He became Managing Director of Lockheed Martin's UK Civil Business in 2009. Martin joined NATS in 2012 to take up the role of Managing Director of Operations responsible for delivering NATS regulated air traffic business. He was appointed CEO in May 2015. He is a keen sailor and lives in the Hampshire countryside with his wife and their 10 year old son.