



## **Background Paper**

# **Sydney Airport's Prescribed Airspace – Proposed amendment**

May 2022

## 1. Purpose

To consult the community and other stakeholders about a proposed change to Sydney Airport's prescribed airspace, as required by the Australian Government's *Guidelines for the Declaration of Prescribed Airspace* (the Guidelines)<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Background

### What is prescribed airspace?

Australian Government regulations have long recognised the need to restrict the height of buildings and other structures (such as cranes) near airports or under flight paths. This protected airspace is formally known as "prescribed airspace".

Prescribed airspace is declared by the Australian Government's Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (DITRDC) as an area where it is "...in the interests of the safety, efficiency or regularity of existing or future air transport operations into or out of an airport for the airspace to be protected."<sup>2</sup>

It is the act of "declaration" by DITRDC that gives prescribed airspace legal protection under the *Airports Act 1996*.

Sydney Airport's existing prescribed airspace was declared by the Australian Government in March 2015, and comprises the following surfaces:

- (i) Obstacle limitation surface (OLS)
- (ii) Procedures for air navigation services – aircraft operations (PANS-OPS) surfaces
- (iii) Navigation aids protection surfaces
- (iv) High intensity approach lights (HIAL) light plane protection surfaces
- (v) Radar Terrain Clearance Chart (RTCC) surfaces
- (vi) Combined radar departures assessment surfaces
- (vii) Precision approach path indicator (PAPI) system protection surfaces

### Why does prescribed airspace need to be protected?

To ensure sustainable future growth and the safety of aircraft and airline passengers, prescribed airspace must be protected from inappropriate developments or other structures that intrude into that airspace.

Protecting prescribed airspace ensures that:

- The airspace aircraft fly in is obstacle-free;
- Radar and other air navigation equipment can operate free from interference; and
- Airport safety lights are not obscured.

If prescribed airspace is not adequately protected, airport efficiency and capacity can be eroded (e.g. reduced runway length, restrictions on aircraft types able to use a particular runway or reduced payload).

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<sup>1</sup> The new guidelines were issued by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications in January 2020.

<sup>2</sup> *Airports Act 1996*, s.181(1).

## How is prescribed airspace protected?

Any proposal to construct or alter a building or other structure that would cause that building or structure to intrude into the prescribed airspace is a “controlled activity”.<sup>3</sup>

While proposals to carry out a controlled activity are submitted in the first instance to the relevant airport operator, the DITRDC is the consent authority. In making its decision, DITRDC considers advice from the airport (which often includes advice from airlines), Airservices Australia and CASA.<sup>4</sup>

DITRDC must approve a proposal unless it would interfere with the safety, efficiency or regularity of existing or future air transport operations into or out of the airport concerned.<sup>5</sup> The only exception is a proposal that would permanently intrude into PANS-OPS, which cannot be approved under any circumstances.<sup>6</sup>

If the controlled activity involves a building, structure or thing intruding into PANS-OPS that is not expected to remain in place for longer than three months, DITRDC may approve the activity, but only if the airport operator supports the activity.<sup>7</sup> Known as “short-term controlled activities” these typically involve cranes.

DITRDC must not approve a proposal for a controlled activity if CASA has advised that carrying out the controlled activity would have an unacceptable effect on the safety of existing or future air transport operations into or out of the airport concerned.<sup>8</sup>

## 3. Proposed amendment to Sydney Airport’s Prescribed Airspace

Sydney Airport’s existing prescribed airspace was declared by DITRDC in March 2015.

Airservices Australia is now proposing to amend one of the prescribed airspace surfaces for which it is primarily responsible, the Radar Terrain Clearance Chart (RTCC).

### What is the RTCC and why is it important?

The Radar Terrain Clearance Chart (RTCC) – also known as a Radar Minimum Altitude Chart – is an airspace chart used by air traffic controllers to indicate the lowest altitude to which a controller may safely vector an aircraft in flight. It acts as a “floor”, below which the presence of obstacles (such as buildings or other structures) may pose an unacceptable risk to aircraft in flight.

### Why the amendment is necessary?

The amendment to prescribed airspace relates to the construction of a new building at 14-30 Lee Street, Haymarket NSW and is being proposed for operational reasons following consultation with Sydney Air Traffic Control.

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<sup>3</sup> *Airports Act 1996*, s. 182(1)(a) and (b).

<sup>4</sup> The only exception relates to “short-term controlled activities” which are activities that are not expected to continue for longer than three months. These are typically cranes.

<sup>5</sup> *Airports (Protection of Airspace) Regulations 1996*, subregulation 14(2).

<sup>6</sup> Short-term controlled activities that would intrude into PANS-OPS may be approved, but only if the airport operator supports the approval.

<sup>7</sup> *Airports (Protection of Airspace) Regulations 1996*, subregulation 14(5).

<sup>8</sup> *Airports (Protection of Airspace) Regulations 1996*, subregulation 14(6).

## How will the RTCC change if the proposed amendment is approved?

The amendment affects a section of airspace between 200 and 300 metres wide and approximately 4.7 kilometres long across the north-east edge of Sydney Airport.

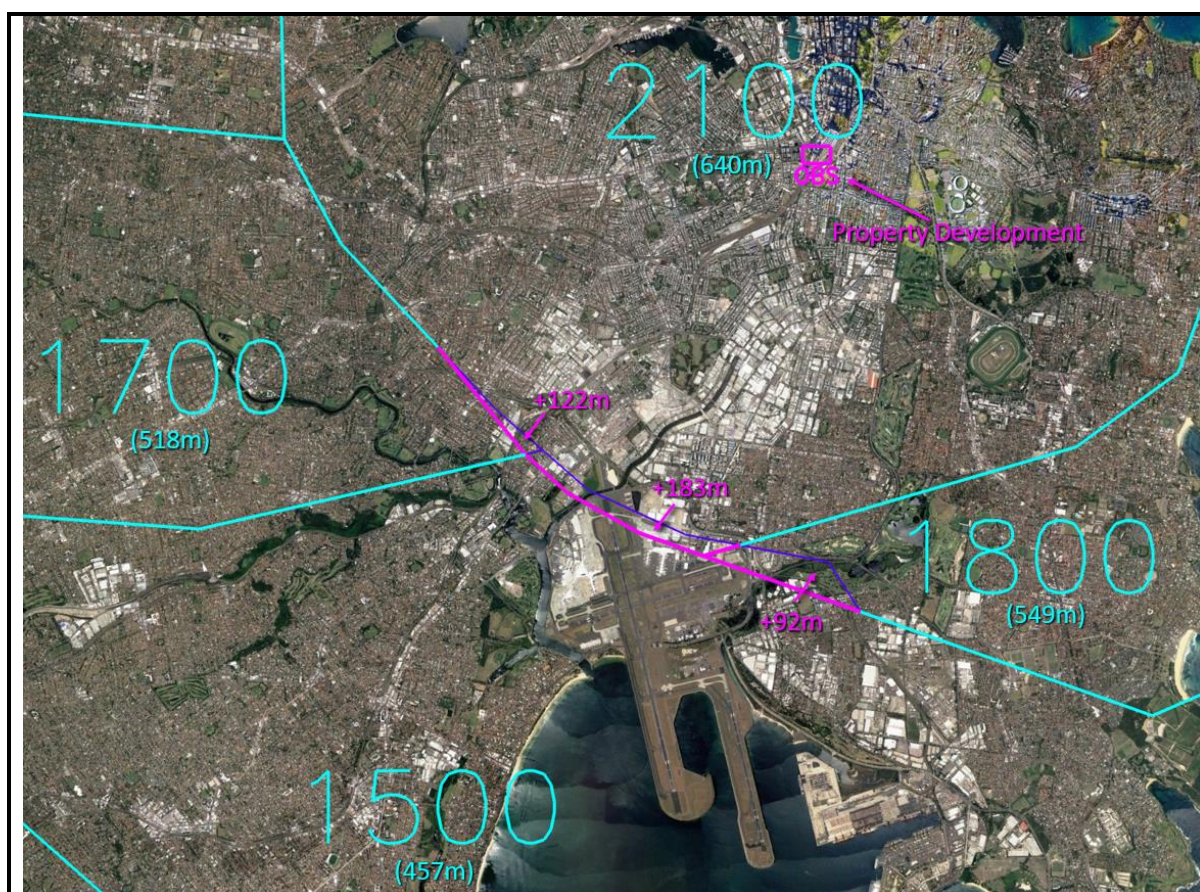
This can be seen in the diagram below, where the dark purple coloured line is proposed to be replaced with the pink coloured line.<sup>9</sup> The location of the proposed property development is also shown.

There would be three separate increases to the RTCC AHD value in this area:

1. Near Tempe, the area increases by 122 metres from 518 metres to 640 metres.
2. Near Mascot, the area increases 183 metres from 457 metres to 640 metres.
3. Near Botany, the area increases 92 metres from 457 metres to 549 metres.

The amendment is being proposed following consultation with Sydney Airport's Air Traffic Control. Its advice to Airservices Australia is that the amendment, if approved by DITRDC, would not affect operations at Sydney Airport.

The proposed amendment, if approved by DITRDC, is also consistent with Sydney Airport's *Master Plan 2039*.



<sup>9</sup> The heights shown in feet and metres are AHD

## 4. Community and Stakeholder Engagement

In January 2020, DITRDC released new *Guidelines for the Declaration of Prescribed Airspace* (the Guidelines). Key elements of the Guidelines include:

- (i) Airport operators must undertake a public consultation process on the proposed airspace prior to applying to DITRDC for declaration, including (relevantly here):
  - consultation with CASA, Airservices Australia, relevant state and local government authorities (including building authorities) in the vicinity of the airport, airlines that use the airport, surrounding airports whose airspace or operations would be affected by the declaration
- (ii) Publishing a notice in relevant local/state newspapers and on the airport's website of the availability of the proposed airspace charts on the airport's website
- (iii) Inviting comments about the proposed airspace to the airport within 20 business days after publication of the notice

### Invitation to comment on the proposed amendment

A public notice was placed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 6 May 2022 inviting members of the public and other key stakeholders to comment on the proposed amendment.

In accordance with the Guidelines, Sydney Airport also wrote to the following organisations inviting each to comment:

- Civil Aviation Safety Authority
- Airservices Australia
- Qantas Airways
- Virgin Australia
- Regional Express (Rex)
- Sydney Metro Airports (the operator of Bankstown Airport)
- Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport
- Australian Airline Pilots Association
- NSW Department of Planning and Environment
- Bayside Council
- Inner West Council
- City of Sydney Council
- Randwick City Council
- Waverley Council
- Canterbury Bankstown Council
- Georges River Council

Submissions should be sent to:

Mr Ted Plummer  
Special Adviser Government and Community Relations  
Sydney Airport  
Locked Bag 5000  
Sydney International Airport NSW 2020

Email: [airspaceprotection@syd.com.au](mailto:airspaceprotection@syd.com.au)

Submissions must be received by no later than 6 June 2022.

Sydney Airport will then give due regard to any written submissions received and forward those submissions and Sydney Airport's summary and response to comments made in those submissions to DITRDC for its consideration.

**Further information**

On or before 31 May 2022, contact Mr Ted Plummer on 0409 072 436.

After 31 May 2022, contact Sydney Airport's Airfield Technical Planning Manager Planning, Mr Peter Bleasdale, on (02) 9667 9246.