



# International Day for the Air Traffic Controller

**A Message from Hon. Minister Bishop Juan Edghill, M. P.  
Minister of Public Works**



Guyana joins the international community to celebrate International Day for Air Traffic Controllers.

2020 started as a normal year. The prospects were of yet another record-breaking year both in terms of international passenger travel and overflights in the Guyana Flight Information Region. The anticipated challenges were immense; executing projects and implementing technology that provide additional air traffic capacity without jeopardising the continuous progress in increasing safety levels were all on stream. It turned out, however, that 2020 will be remembered as the year when life as we knew it changed. News of the novel coronavirus spreading in Wuhan made the headlines in January. Subsequently, all of us in the aviation industry were following closely what was happening in Asia, horrified with the impact this was causing to air traffic. It did not take long, however, until we started feeling the brunt in Guyana and the Caribbean. It took only a few months, before the air traffic fell to almost 2% of 2019 levels. The aviation industry had never experienced such a hard-hitting global crisis since World War II.

As a small developing nation with two international airports, Guyana's economy relies on air connectivity and tourism as part of its development trajectory. It was crucial, therefore, that despite the situation, there was continuity in service. The pandemic, however, brought with it two major challenges: the risk of infection of staff that could compromise continuity of service and the drop in revenue due to the slump in air traffic.

At the start of the pandemic, a crisis management team was quickly established. The major decisions that were taken at the time were to introduce several measures to minimise the risk of infection and revise contingency plans to adapt to the unfolding situation. Operational staff rosters were modified with the objective of minimising the number of persons working in close but

necessary proximity to each other and limiting to an absolute minimum the mixing of staff between shifts, having standby units at home in case they needed to be called in urgently, and establishing contingency arrangements for emergency, in case of actual or suspected COVID-19 cases, amongst others.

All this was possible with the minimal traffic that was being serviced and it also contributed to much needed savings in operational costs. Operational training was halted. Major cost-cutting was achieved through the postponement of all non-essential projects.

Eighteen months passed, quickly but painfully, and the relaxation of air travel measures were welcome. Commercial traffic started picking up again. Yet again, new challenges were encountered - with an increase in traffic, rosters were revisited, training resumed and with the knowledge that the virus will be with us for a while yet, projects had to be restarted.

A key advantage was also the fact that we had adapted ourselves and adjusted our lives to live with COVID-19. Once again, we made the necessary changes and we continue learning as we move along. All this was possible with the professionalism and flexibility of GCAA's management and staff. We look forward to the days when COVID-19 is no longer a concern, when air traffic starts hitting records again, when the norms we were accustomed to, return.

On this International Day for Air Traffic Controllers, I express my sincerest gratitude to the air traffic controllers and technicians who keep Guyana's air traffic services open, safe, and efficient. Their dutiful and diligent efforts help bolster our country's economy, strengthen their local communities, and connect millions of travellers to their jobs, friends, and families each and every day.

**Hon. Bishop Juan Edghill, M.P.  
Minister of Public Works**