



FABEC Free route airspace adds Swiss entire upper airspace, adjoining French airspace, and German cross-border routes

5 December 2022 – From 1 December 2022, airspace users flying in Switzerland's upper airspace gained access to shorter, more efficient flight plan route options following the implementation of Free Route Airspace (FRA) by Skyguide above FL195. FRA represents a fundamental change to the way airlines submit their flight plans. In place of the Air Traffic Services (ATS) Route Network, operators can plan routes between defined horizontal entry and exit points and select the optimum flight paths to suit their needs. This enables airlines to plan more direct routes and flight plans to align more closely with the actual route flown.

To ensure airspace capacity and flight safety is maintained, FRA waypoints continue to adhere to the Eurocontrol Route Availability Document (RAD) – as under the ATS Route Network – and connections between the various FRA points remain subject to airspace availability, so can be blocked by the activation of Temporary Reserved Areas (TRAs).

The Swiss programme follows FRA implementation in adjacent French and German area control centres, and similar procedures in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. French air navigation service provider DSN introduced FRA in Paris, Bordeaux and Brest in December 2021, and plans partial FRA at its two remaining area control centres of Marseille and Rheims in February 2024, followed by complete implementation in February 2025. Since introducing FRA, DSN reports a decrease of about 0.5% in the distances planned by operators in these regions, equivalent to between 11,000-12,500 tons less fuel use and up to 40,000 tons less carbon dioxide emissions annually. This is approximately the same as 250,000 passengers making a return trip from Paris to Nice and demonstrates how FRA contributes to efforts to decarbonize air transport.

Also on 1 December, cross-border FRA operations became available between Switzerland and Germany. Flights are now able to cross the boundary between national cells without using specified entry and exit points, adding more direct route options for airspace users. DFS Deutsche Flugsicherung GmbH merged two FRA cells to form a new cell to simplify the cross-border airspace structure, expanding FRA possibilities already existing since 2019 with Denmark and Sweden and since early 2022 with Austria. For winter 2023/24, additional cross border procedures are planned between Karlsruhe and Maastricht airspace.

FRA implementation in Switzerland and by FABEC partners was achieved with full cooperation and support of EUROCONTROL Network Manager and is aligned with European Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2021/116.

The airspace of the six FABEC States of Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Switzerland is one of the busiest and most complex in the world. The majority of the major European airports, major civil airways and military training areas are located in this area. FABEC airspace covers 1.7 million km² and handles about 55% of European air traffic. Winner of the ATM 2020 Research, Innovation and Environment Award.

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