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| **Radiocommunication Study Groups** |  |
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| Annex 14 to Working Party 5A Chairman’s Report |
| PRELIMINARY DRAFT NEW REPORT ITU-R [LMS.ATG] |
| Systems for public mobile communications with aircraft |

# 1 Introduction

This Report deals with the general principles, technical characteristics and operational features of terrestrial systems for public mobile communications with aircraft.

# 2 General operational considerations

**2.1** The system should be fully compatible and capable of interfacing with the international public switched telephone network, public data network, the Internet, or any combinations thereof.

**2.2** The system should have adequate bandwidth to meet the foreseeable demand for the services.

**2.3** The Quality of Service should be that which meets the objectives of the system. For example, if the objective is to provide high quality voice service, then the Quality of Service should be comparable to that of the public switched network (voice and data). If the objective is to provide best-effort Internet type traffic, then typically there are no Quality of Service mechanisms being used, at least for the best-effort traffic.

**2.4** The system should provide, in so far as possible, uninterrupted coverage throughout the designated service areas with the capability of coordinated operation across national borders.

**2.5** The airborne equipment must be electromagnetically compatible with other aircraft systems in accordance with appropriate regulatory requirements and should have minimal impact on aircraft engineering, maintenance and operations.

**2.6** The system must have no adverse influence on the safe operation of the aircraft.

**2.7** The system should not cause harmful interference to other terrestrial communication systems.

# 3 System technical characteristics and operational features

**3.1** Technical characteristics and operational features of the system for public communications with aircraft in some countries in Region 1 are given in Annex 1.

**3.2** Technical characteristics and operational features of the system for public communications with aircraft in some countries in Region 2 are given in Annex 2.

**3.3** Technical characteristics and operational features of the system for public communications with aircraft in some countries in Region 3 are given in Annex 3.

**3.4** Channel propagation effects on a terrestrial air-to-ground system are given in Recommendation ITU-R P.528-3 “Propagation curves for aeronautical mobile and radionavigation services using the VHF, UHF and SHF bands,” which provides useful information for design of systems for public mobile communications with aircraft.

**Annexes:** 3

ANNEX 1

Systems for public communications with aircraft
in some countries in Region 1

# 1 Introduction

A broadband Direct Air-to-Ground Communications (DA2GC) system constitutes an application to provide for various types of telecommunications services, such as internet access and mobile multimedia services, during flights. The connection with the flight passengers’ user terminals on‑board aircraft is to be realised by already available fixed or Wi-Fi-based on-board connectivity network and/or via GSMOBA (GSM on board aircraft) and in the future possibly also via UMTS and/or LTE.

The main application field would be Air Passenger Communications (APC). In addition a broadband DA2GC system could also support Airline Administrative Communications services (AAC) and thus improve aircraft operation, resulting in particular in reduced OPEX for the airlines. Safety-relevant communications such as Air Traffic Control (ATC) and related services are not intended to be covered.

In some countries in Region 1, there are currently three systems aiming to provide broadband DA2GC. These are described in the sections below.

# 2 System 1 as described in ETSI TR 103 054

## 2.1 System architecture

This broadband DA2GC system is based on 3GPP LTE Rel. 8+ specifications. In particular synchronization algorithms as well as the maximum Tx power of the On-board Unit (OBU) are to be modified compared to terrestrial mobile radio usage in order to cope with the high Doppler frequency shift caused by aircraft speed and large cell sizes. In addition the Ground Station (GS) antenna adjustment has to be matched to cover typical aircraft altitudes between 3 and 12 km by adaptation of vertical diagrams including antenna up-tilt. When commercial, this solution will be able to provide in-flight mobile voice and broadband data communications services.

The major building blocks (see Figure 1 below) of the end-to-end system architecture are:

– service access network infrastructure on-board the aircraft, e.g. WiFi coverage and GSMOBA (both already standardised);

– DA2GC network infrastructure on-board aircraft, e.g. modem (OBU), interface to on-board network(s), external antenna, cabling;

– terrestrial radio access network for DA2GC with broadband backhaul links, which would preferably be based on existing infrastructure, but with modifications (e.g. with regard to antenna types and base station implementation) to establish high-performance radio links to aircraft in DA2GC environment;

– mobile core network for session, mobility, subscriber and security management providing IP connectivity to external packet data networks (e.g. intranet, internet, IMS);

– central network components required for O&M, billing, etc. in the DA2GC network;

– various IP-based service delivery platforms e.g. for passenger services or for airline or aircraft repair / manufacturer internal applications.

Figure 1

System architecture for the broadband DA2GC system as described in ETSI TR 103 054



## 2.2 Spectrum needs

Spectrum above 6 GHz is not viewed as appropriate for such an application due to wave propagation aspects (e.g. increased path loss, Doppler shift).

Paired spectrum of 2 x 10 MHz for FDD operation is considered necessary to cope with short- to medium-term demand. Unpaired spectrum of 20 MHz for TDD operation would also be an option, but system performance would slightly suffer due to guard time intervals required for large cell sizes.

## 2.3 Test flights

For this system a trial flight with prototype equipment was successfully performed in Germany within the 2.6 GHz FDD bands (useable only for trial, but not available for deployment of DA2GC due to planned LTE-deployment for terrestrial cellular mobile) with a signal bandwidth of 2 x 10 MHz.

Trial set-up details (see Figure 2):

– Two sites with an inter-site distance of about 100 km were equipped with LTE-based DA2GC GSs consisting of baseband unit (BBU) and remote radio head (RRH) and with antennas with three sectors (up-tilt), connected with an LTE evolved packet core (EPC) and measurement & data trace servers via a broadband data transport network.

– An Airbus A320 aircraft was equipped with a DA2GC OBU with maximum Tx power of 37 dBm and with two DA2GC antennas below the aircraft fuselage (2 Rx / 1 Tx).

Figure 2

Trial flight set-up for the broadband DA2GC system as described in ETSI TR 103 054



During the 3 hours lasting trial flight the aircraft flew with speeds between 500 and more than 800 km/h at different altitudes between 4 000 m and 10 000 m. The flight maneuvers included phases with inter- and intra-site (sector) handovers as well as phases with large distances to the sites.

Trial results:

– The radio link between the GS and Aircraft Station (AS) was established at distances of more than 100 km from the sites to the aircraft flying at speeds of more than 800 km/h and altitudes up to 10 000 m.

– Peak data rates of up to 30 Mbit/s in the forward link (ground-to-air) and 17 Mbit/s in the reverse link (air-to-ground) were achieved.

– In addition to high background data traffic a video conference was established between the teams in the aircraft and the test center which allowed to follow the flight phases in real time and to demonstrate the low latency of the overall DA2GC system (round trip time < 50 ms) compared to satellite-based systems.

It should be noted that the GS equipment used (except of antenna adjustment) was basically state of the art LTE-equipment for 2.6 GHz terrestrial cellular mobile deployment. Only the OBU was modified to allow the overall system to work in the aeronautical environment with large cell ranges and high aircraft speeds. The trial showed the very high performance and flexibility of the LTE‑based technology even in this early release state.

# 3 System 2 as described in ETSI TR 101 599

## 3.1 System architecture

This broadband DA2GC system makes use of adaptive beamforming antennas in order to achieve the desired system performance whilst maintaining lower transmit power levels than would otherwise be necessary. This feature eases co-frequency sharing with other systems by minimising interference into other services and, at the same time, reducing the impact of incoming interference on the achievable link performance. The decision to use beamforming technology in this DA2GC system implementation was also influenced by the current policy drive in Europe and elsewhere. This recognises the increasing demand on finite spectrum resources and encourages spectrum sharing through the use of smart technologies etc.

The overall system connectivity also enables the facility to provide non-safety relevant airline information services whilst maintaining complete isolation between such data and the various internet and infotainment services available to passengers in the aircraft cabin.

From a frequency sharing perspective, an important feature of this system is the use of four sectors at the ground station, with each sector having at least eight phased array beamforming antennas (i.e. eight elements per quadrant) and an array of digitally controlled antenna elements connected to the aircraft radio, which are mounted on the underside of the airframe in order to constitute an adaptive array.

The use of beamforming permits the production of shaped and dynamically steerable beams in both the forward link (ground-to-air) and reverse link (air-to-ground) directions, thereby enabling the desired system performance objectives to be maintained as the aircraft traverses its route whilst, at the same time, minimising interference into other co-frequency systems. This is achieved through the benefits of tailored radiation patterns which can be optimised to reduce interference and allow operation at lower transmit powers (on the ground and in the air) than would otherwise be necessary if more conventional fixed antennas were deployed.

In respect of the underlying modulation and coding schemes used, etc., the system uses OFDM/TDMA and has much in common with other existing and proposed mobile broadband backhaul technologies.

## 3.2 Spectrum needs

This broadband DA2GC system is optimised for use in the frequency bands around 2.4 GHz and 5.8 GHz, which are used for various licence-exempt radio applications. The system can operate with variable bandwidths in any sub-band within the relevant frequency range. For optimum performance, in TDD mode, the system would require a contiguous block of spectrum of 20 MHz. Alternatively, 2 × 10 MHz contiguous blocks would be needed if operated in FDD mode (although the forward and return links need not necessarily be within the same frequency band). These spectrum requirements are driven by the need to supply sufficient capacity to serve passengers and crew on-board the aircraft with the desired range of broadband services.

## 3.3 Test flights

This system has already undergone initial flight testing in the 2.4 GHz and 5.8 GHz bands.

# 4 System 3 as described in draft ETSI draft TR 103 108

## 4.1 System architecture

This broadband DA2GC system is a UMTS TDD system based on commercial off the shelf equipment that complies with the 3GPP Release 7 standards. A separate frequency converter is used to support operation in the 5 855-5 875 MHz band although operation in other bands has been demonstrated. Signal-in-space characteristics conform to these standards apart from the operating frequency band, Doppler shift compensation, and extended timing advance to accommodate increased range.

Any co-channel interference is minimised using ground station antenna control whereby sectors not required by aircraft at a given time are not illuminated. (i.e., the transmitter is inhibited).

The overall end-to-end system architecture of the broadband DA2GC system is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3

System architecture for the broadband DA2GC system as described in ETSI TR 103 108

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The major building blocks of the end-to-end system architecture, similar to those described in section 2.1, include flight deck and cabin WLAN access, dedicated air/ground IP backhaul and a network control function providing, among other things, security.

## 4.2 Spectrum needs

The system can use switch-selectable bandwidths of 5 or 10 MHz. Although single channel operation is possible, the use of additional channels reduces potential inter-cell interference and also any interference to other systems.

The required spectrum is 20 MHz candidate band thereby enabling 2 x 10 MHz or 4 x 5 MHz channels. The system does not require contiguous spectrum.

## 4.3 Test flights

A series of test flights using 3G technology have been completed using two turbojet aircraft types. These demonstrated a robust air to ground link in different spectrum bands, namely VHF (aeronautical communications), 2 GHz and 5 GHz. Live video from the flight deck and cabin was transmitted to the ground. Simultaneously an international voice call was made by one passenger while another browsed the internet and watched a streaming video from a ground server. Ranges in excess of 250 km were achieved which is operationally important to maintain coverage over, for example, the Mediterranean Sea.

For certain 5 GHz flights, a modified aircraft marker antenna was used. This included two 5 GHz antenna elements in addition to the marker element itself. This new antenna had the same form and fit as the original, thereby simplifying installation.

ANNEX 2

System for public communications with aircraft
in some countries in Region 2

System for public communications with aircraft in Canada

In Canada, the band pair 849-851 MHz and 894-896 MHz is allocated to the aeronautical mobile service for public correspondence with aircraft[[1]](#footnote-1). Furthermore, the designation of this spectrum includes air-ground radiocommunication applications such as voice telephony, broadband Internet and data transmission.

The band plan, described below in Fig. 1, is based on two block pairs: 849-850.5/894-895.5 MHz and 850.5-851/895.5-896 MHz. The band 849-851 MHz is limited to transmissions from ground stations and the use of the band 894-896 MHz is limited to transmissions from airborne stations.



The technical rules for certification and systems deployment in the band in Canada are technology neutral. The maximum ERP limits for ground stations and airborne stations are as follows:

– Ground Station: 500 W ERP

– Airborne Station: 12 W ERP.

The systems will be deployed using a cellular topology based on frequency reuse. The cell size and separation are dictated by the minimum and maximum flight altitudes of the serviced aircraft. Each ground station has an operating radius up to the radio horizon distance, which depends on the aircraft’s altitude – for example about 480 km for 13 700 metres.

Actual cell separations are influenced by additional issues such as ground station altitudes and antenna heights, fading margins, knowledge of aircraft locations, and topological considerations. These considerations together with traffic requirements represent some of the inputs required for the radio network planning of the air-ground network.

System for air-ground radiotelephone within
the United States of America

In the United States, the air-ground radiotelephone service falls under the U.S. Federal Communications (FCC) Part 22 rules, Subpart G. This service includes commercial and general aviation services. Licensees may offer a wide range of telecommunications services to passengers and others on aircraft.

Commercial aviation air-ground systems

This service operates in the 849-851 MHz and 894-896 MHz frequencies, similar to that in Canada. These bands are designated for paired nationwide exclusive assignment to the licensee or licensees of systems providing radio telecommunications service, including voice and/or data service, to persons on board aircraft. However, fixed services and ancillary land mobile services are not permitted.

Commercial aviation air-ground systems may use any type of emission or technology that complies with the technical rules in Part 22, subpart G:

General aviation air-ground radiotelephone service

This service operate in the 454-459 MHz band and can provide a variety of telecommunications services to private aircraft such as small single engine planes and corporate jets. CFR47 § 22.805 contains the channel allocations for the general aviation air-ground service. These channels have a bandwidth of 20 kHz and are designated by their center frequencies in MegaHertz.

Table 1

Signalling channel pair for general aviation air-ground systems

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Ground** | **Airborne mobile** |
| 454.675 | 459.675 |

Communication channel pairs

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Ground** | **Airborne mobile** |
| 454.700 | 459.700 |
| 454.725 | 459.725 |
| 454.750 | 459.750 |
| 454.775 | 459.775 |
| 454.800 | 459.800 |
| 454.825 | 459.825 |
| 454.850 | 459.850 |
| 454.875 | 459.875 |
| 454.900 | 459.900 |
| 454.925 | 459.925 |
| 454.950 | 459.950 |
| 454.975 | 459.975 |

Notes on Table 1:

a) Channel 454.675 MHz is assigned to each and every ground station, to be used only for automatically alerting airborne mobile stations of incoming calls.

b) All airborne mobile channels are assigned for use by each and every airborne mobile station.

The transmitting power of ground and airborne mobile transmitters operating in the general aviation air-ground radiotelephone service on the channels listed in CFR47 § 22.805 must not exceed:

a) *Ground station transmitters.*The effective radiated power of ground stations must not exceed 100 Watts and must not be less than 50 Watts, except as provided in CFR47 § 2.811.

b) *Airborne mobile transmitters.*The transmitter power output of airborne mobile transmitters must not exceed 25 Watts and must not be less than 4 Watts.

Safety-of-flight considerations

In addition to the FCC’s rules governing air-ground services, the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and aircraft operator rules and policies restrict the use of personal electronic devices (PEDs) on aircraft. The use of PEDs, which include wireless telephones, pagers, personal digital assistants, portable music players, video games and laptop computers, remains subject to FAA and aircraft operator authority over in-flight safety. Providers of in-flight wireless broadband and other communications services using the air-to-ground frequencies must coordinate with airlines and comply with any FAA rules in order to offer such services. Aircraft operators undertake extensive testing and adhere to stringent safety certification protocols when installing and operating communications equipment to ensure that all avionics systems are protected from interference in accordance with FAA rules.

The current FCC rules can be found at:

<http://wireless.fcc.gov/index.htm?job=rules_and_regulations>

ANNEX 3

System for public communications with aircraft
in some countries in Region 3

# 1 Introduction

To meet the growing demand of the current and future airborne broadband communication, China has made significant effort on planning, developing, and deploying the Air-to-Ground (ATG) communication systems with aircraft. The system is based on the SCDMA broadband wireless access standard in Recommendation ITU-R M.1801. The SCDMA wireless broadband access system contains base stations and terminals. The base stations deployed to cover the entire flight course and communicate with the airborne terminals to achieve broadband communication between the ground and airplanes. The prototype systems have been successfully tested in trial flights at the frequency range of 1.785-1.805 GHz. The system’s ATG broadband communication capability has been successfully tested in China.

# 2 Operational features

The system operational features are as follows:

– Automatically connecting to the terrestrial broadband wireless network to provide ground-to-air communications.

– Supporting the voice, trunked voice and broadband data communication services such as providing backhaul of the on-board WiFi, cellular pico-cells, and on-board wireline voice calls and internet access.

– Supporting the seamless communication roaming and handoff on the complete flight course.

# 3 System architecture

The basic system architecture is shown in Fig. 1.

The system functions are as follows:

– The system includes base stations (BTS) on the ground connected to PTSN, internet and airborne terminals with interfaces to other on-board devices such as wireline hubs, WiFi routers, pico-cells, among others.

– The radio access layer provides the radio access functions between the BTS and airborne terminals. The radio access layer performs basic radio access functions such random access, paging, voice communications, data communications and trunked voice functions.

– The core control layer provides the control functions, such as handoff, roaming, terminal and user authentication, voice call switching, and data routing. It is between the BTS and other core network equipment such as data switches and routers, soft switches, media gateways, AAA (Authentication, Authorization, and Accounting) servers, billing servers, and HLR (Home Location Register).

– This entire ATG communication network including all layers supports separation of different data flows and also provides adequate protection on the data.

Figure 1

System architecture



# 4 Channelization scenario

The SCDMA radio interface supports a channel bandwidth of a multiple of 1 MHz up to 5 MHz. Sub‑channelization and code spread, specially defined inside each 1 MHz bandwidth, provides frequency diversity and interference observation capability for radio resource assignment with bandwidth granularity of 8 kbit/s. The channelization also allows coordinated dynamic channel allocations among cells to efficiently avoid mutual interference. The system employs TDD to separate uplink and downlink transmission.

1. Refer to <http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/smt-gst.nsf/eng/sf09134.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)