

Aviation

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An efficient and secure air transport system capable of ensuring the country's international reach and promoting economic growth is an essential factor in ensuring the country's sustainable development.

In the context of differences in track gauge in the territory of the European Union and the former Soviet Union (including In Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia), air transport is in fact the only alternative to mass passenger transport between Latvia and the rest of Europe.

Only air transport can ensure Latvia's reach, not only from Europe, but also from any other place in the world, thereby contributing to the country's economic development.

Air transport has a big impact on the country's economic development and gross domestic product growth. It creates preconditions and promotes the development of other sectors, particularly tourism, and makes a major contribution to increasing employment.

The main elements of the industry structure ensuring the performance of air transport are the SJSC "Riga International Airport" (hereinafter referred to as "Riga Airport"), the SJSC "Latvijas gaisa satiksme" (hereinafter referred to as "LGS") and air carriers, of which the national carrier A/S "Air Baltic Corporation" (hereinafter referred to as "Airbaltic") has the greatest influence.

Riga Airport served 7.798 million passengers in 2019. According to the Airport Council International, (ACI Europe) air traffic report on the performance of airports in 2019, Riga Airport has been the third fastest-growing airport between Europe's largest and capital airports. Since 2005, the number of passengers served by Riga Airport has increased more than four times and it has become a convincing leader between airports in the Baltic States as well as one of the fastest growing airports in the European Union. Much has been done in terms of upgrading the infrastructure of Riga Airport.

AirBaltic operates flights from Riga, Vilnius and Tallinn. In order to ensure the further development of an airline important for the economy, the State has become the main shareholder of Airbaltic, with an 80,05% stake. The Airbaltic Business Plan, which marks the development of the airline's future, including upgrading the aircraft fleet, cost optimisation, increasing performance, increasing revenue and improving the flight route network, is being successfully implemented. In 2019, Airbaltic has served more than 5 million passengers for the first time in its existence, which is 22% more than in 2018.

The volume of services provided by LGS is increasing. The integration of LGS into the EU's "Single European Sky" programme continues. In 2012, a state level agreement was concluded on the establishment of a North European Functional Airspace Block (NEFAB) between the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Finland, the Republic of Latvia and the Kingdom of Norway. The work of NEFAB is chaired by the NEFAB Council, the chairperson of which shall be rotated annually in accordance with the agreement. In 2020, the NEFAB Council is chaired by Latvia, which took over from Finland at the end of 2019.

The establishment of NEFAB and other functional airspace blocks of the European Union is a step towards the creation of a Single European Sky, which will include a coherent European network that will include routes, route management and the organisation of air traffic management to increase flight efficiency and safety levels, reduce fuel consumption, and reduce damage of air transport to the environment and at the same time reduce airline costs.

The legal basis for scheduled air traffic with the third countries shall be provided by intergovernmental air services agreements. They are currently concluded with 18 countries and work is ongoing on the conclusion of new agreements to expand the network of scheduled flight routes.

The requirements of the European Aviation Safety Agency in the field of certification of infrastructure facilities, air carriers and aviation personnel are ensured, avoiding the involvement of elements not complying with the quality and safety requirements in

the air transport system.

The reorganisation of Liepāja Airport has been completed in 2016 and it has received a certificate for provision of scheduled flights. In May 2017, Airbaltic launched and continues scheduled flights to Liepāja. In 2019, Liepāja Airport has served 14 082 passengers (including 13 835 passengers in scheduled traffic, which is 48.5% more than in 2018).

Goal

To maintain and develop an economically efficient air transport system providing safe, high-quality and accessible air services to the public. With the development of a dynamic air transport system, ensure investment in the Latvian economy and make Riga an air traffic centre for direct and transit passengers, while taking measures to minimise the environmental impact of the activity of industry companies.

In order to achieve this, it is necessary to ensure:

- efficient management and regulation of the air transport system, development-oriented air transport policy;
- infrastructure complying with the safety and technical standards laid down in international law capable of providing existing and expected volumes of air transport;
- efficient local air carrier capable of providing not only direct flights but also significant transit flow at the Riga Airport;
- upgrading the infrastructure of regional airports to create pre-conditions for scheduled flights from them and to ensure regional connectivity.

Future priorities

In order to promote the development of the aviation sector by 2027, it is necessary to:

- Increase the impact of Riga as a major European air traffic centre by further developing the infrastructure of the Riga International Airport, expanding the route network, promoting the growth of transit passenger traffic and promoting attractive price policies.
- Take steps to further develop Airbaltic, including the attraction of a strategic investor.
- Increase the terminal and aerodrome capacity of the Riga Airport to ensure the serving of the planned increased number of passengers.
- Ensure the construction of a new air traffic control tower.
- Continue to implement the Free Route Sky Project.
- Integrate unmanned aircraft into the air traffic control system.
- Develop high-precision navigation based on satellite technologies.
- Continue the participation of the SJSC “Latvijas gaisa satiksme” in the “Single European Sky” programme of the European Union, by introducing new technologies enhancing aviation safety.
- Encourage the development of regional airports.
- Continue to enter into bilateral air services agreements with the third countries in order to promote the development of Latvia's air transport market, provide new opportunities for the Latvian air carriers to expand the route network, including the codeshare flights, and provide the Latvian passengers with different opportunities to reach as many places as possible in the world.
- Ensure Latvia's accession to international conventions and treaties in order to promote cooperation with other countries and to ensure a more efficient common organisation of air traffic services and to increase air safety.
- To develop legislation regulating the aviation sector and monitor their implementation, in order to promote the development of the air transport sector.

Coordinate development plans for aviation infrastructure sites and air carriers in order to ensure that the objectives of the air transport policy are achieved.

To maintain a high and internationally recognised level of aviation safety by issuing Latvian and foreign air carriers permits for the performance of air transport.

Coordinate civil-military aviation cooperation.

To represent Latvia in international civil aviation organisations, as well as to identify and defend the interests of the country, Latvian residents and the aviation industry in the EU (including in the development of new legislation). To ensure representation in the following areas: consumer protection, aviation safety and security, air policy making with third countries - conclusion of horizontal and multilateral agreements, realisation of the Single European Sky Project, cooperation of functional airspace blocks, insurance, ticket booking, environmental protection, reduction of noise and pollution caused by aviation, technical harmonisation, provision of groundhandling services, prevention of unfair competition, provision of passenger rights and other matters.

Expected results

Riga - a dynamically growing air hub of the Baltic region and European level with a well-developed network of flight routes in the west - east and north - south, with 15 million passengers served in 2036.

Aviation safety level not below EU average.

Technical conformity and safety standards for air transport are timely updated, implemented and maintained.

Increasing export of services as a major contribution of air transport to the economy.

Created pre-conditions for the efficient development of tourism and related industries.

Safe, high-quality and diverse air transport services are available to the Latvian residents and businesses.

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