

**VATSIM Board of Governors  
Quarterly Meeting Minutes – 22 December 2007**

**Governors Present:**

Michael Bevington (MB)  
Norman Blackburn (NB)  
Ross Carlson (RossC)  
Roland Collins(RolC)  
Florian Harms (FH)  
Richard Jenkins (RJ)  
David Klain (DK)  
Ruth McTighe (RM)  
Kyle Ramsey (KR)  
Michael Zazula (MZ)

Richard Jenkins called the meeting to order at 1907z. Ruth McTighe took the minutes.

RJ welcomed Florian Harms to the Board of Governors and to the meeting.

**Old business**

All matters arising from the previous agenda have been included in the agenda for this meeting.

**New business**

**1) VATSIM website**

RM summarised the present situation regarding the new website. She, Nick Partridge and Joel Lesser had started to develop a temporary website, based on Wordpress, but this had difficulties as it required considerable coding expertise and was not a true CMS. FH was now offering a proposal for a CMS-based website, which RM felt should be explored further. However Richard Critz had expressed concern that the present servers could not handle a CMS, and probably could not be updated to the standard required. RM requested governors' guidance on how this could be moved forward.

FH saw a new website as a priority for VATSIM, both for communicating with members and for marketing. He proposed running the site on a separate dedicated webserver, which is his current practice when setting up a CMS system. He would be happy to do this on behalf of VATSIM on the server he is already providing for VATSIM purposes. He has also identified VATSIM members who would be able to provide technical input into the server management.

DK agreed the webserver needs to be separate from the FSD servers. However he was concerned about the potential for PHP, MySQL and PERL to slow the website down, especially when there are high numbers of users. FH estimated the specialised webserver could easily cope with an expected 10 -15 thousand visits a day.

NB was concerned that moving the website to a separate server could cause problems with other applications, in particular the CERT system. FH felt it should be possible to set-up routings to the various parts of the system on the different servers. Separating the servers would also improve security, and allow easier software updating on the specialised server.

RJ will speak to Richard Critz about his concerns, and then consider the options in conjunction with RM and FH.

## **2) Charitable fund-raising update**

RJ has discussed with George Marinakis regarding raising funds for charities with whom we do not have an established relationship. The BoG needs to demonstrate to the members that it has shown due diligence in ensuring that donations are received by the charity to which they have been given.

The BoG agreed that DK would draw up a checklist and procedure for applications to run fundraising events. This should include

- the request must be made in writing to the VP Operations, who will be responsible for checking and recommending approval to the BoG
- the charity must be a reputable charity concerned in some way with aviation
- donations must be made directly to the charity, and not handled by a VATSIM member
- there must be a clear line of accountability to ensure the plan is not deviated from.

The checklist will be approved by the BoG via the mailing list and the voting system, and then posted on the website.

The matter of corporate sponsorship was deferred until George Marinakis could be available.

## **3) MITRE**

RossC summarised the position regarding the MITRE project. MITRE is a USA organisation which does research for the FAA, working with real world controllers and pilots in research simulations. They approached VATSIM as this would allow them to use greater numbers of “pilots” than on their own small-scale research network. They have a lot of ideas about how VATSIM could be involved, but are aware of some of the practical difficulties. The first event will be at Chicago on Jan 5<sup>th</sup> and is intended to assess the logistics of organising such events.

RJ, DK and RossC spoke of the advantages to VATSIM of this partnership. They include a tremendous gain in legitimacy, assisting with improving real-world aviation safety, putting us on the leading edge of flight simulation, developing flight-sim software, and rapid implementation of new technologies. There may be financial reimbursement in the longer term.

The meeting agreed the process of publicising the Chicago event through priority notification to the partner VAs as well as a NOTAM to the general membership. RossC will speak to the Chicago Events Director about organising the Chicago controllers, which appears not to have progressed very far at present.

The governors discussed the necessity of tighter controls on pilot behaviour during such events, to ensure MITRE gets the maximum benefit from the collaboration. Supervisors will be monitoring the radio channels, and will have the authority to intervene early. RossC stressed that this is a test event, so that if using a NOTAM for publicity results in too many inexperienced pilots or sightseers, we should use this as a learning experience for the organisation of future events.

Controllers will be advised that a supervisor should only be called if a pilot's action affects the success of the event. MZ recommended that for this event, any request from a Chicago controller for supervisor action should be given priority and actioned quickly.

The governors agreed that before any MITRE event pilots will be advised:

- they must be able to fly the route as filed
- they must respond to ATC instructions quickly and accurately
- they must be able to use voice
- the expected standard of flying will be higher than normally implemented on VATSIM

- pilots who deviate from their flight plan or are not responsive enough can expect to be disconnected from the network, but this will not affect the pilot's VATSIM record

Ross C suggested that a broadcast is made when the event takes place advising all pilots of the restrictions, and a webpage is set up that pilots who are disconnected can be directed to for a detailed explanation.

MITRE are aware that not all pilots will have the latest NavData, and we cannot require them to purchase this. It may be possible in the future for MITRE to make subsets of up-to-date navigation data available to VATSIM pilots for events.

Other ideas discussed but no decisions made:

- limiting the airspace to designated callsigns only (locking-down)
  - would help the MITRE project
  - but might be perceived badly by pilots not involved in the event
- restricting specific events to selected VA's
- identifying a cadre of highly-skilled pilots
- using pilots who have completed a VA training program
- MZ is planning to have a system of announcing named supervisors for major events, which will be listed on a webpage.

MZ pointed out that closure of airspace can be considered realistic and a fun challenge for pilots. However there should be clear guidelines as to who is authorised to close airspace and when, and it should be announced clearly in advance. RolC is currently drafting guidelines following the experience of WorldFlight.

#### **Action plan**

KR and FH: notify VA's and send NOTAM

RJ and RolC: agree arrangements for restricting airspace

MZ: notify supervisors about event and additional restrictions

RJ: send details of MITRE pages to BoG

All: create own accounts on MITRE registration page

#### **4) Continuity of operations**

DK has had very little response to his request for Governors' contingency plans for unexpected absence. He will be contacting all governors again for this information in the next three weeks.

RossC pointed out that VP networks and VP Development largely cover for one another, but the VP Networks position is currently vacant. It is unofficially covered by Luca Benelli, supporting RossC. DK will liaise with RossC. Further discussion regarding the VP networks will take place on the BoG mailing list.

### **5) Central American Region Staffing.**

RolC summarised the situation regarding the Central American RD position. This has been empty for a long time, and there have been no suitable applicants for the position. The divisions seem to be quite small and separate with hardly any development. They need a lot of support, which RolC is not in a position to do himself. Governors discussed options for the future, including advertising globally for an RD, or realigning the individual divisions to other regions. As the situation may be quite different now from when the post was previously advertised, RolC will readvertise it on a global basis.

### **6) South America Region**

The BoG has recently received an e-mail from a member expressing concern about the current situation in VATSIM Brazil.

The meeting entered executive session at 2109z

The meeting left executive session at 2125z

**Action:** RolC to forward the e-mail in an anonymised format to the RD VATSAM for his urgent response, and will reply directly to the writer of the e-mail.

### **7) Global Controller Rating Policy**

RolC reported he is receiving mixed reports on how implementation is unfolding. Some divisions appear not to be implementing it as planned, and he will be taking this up with the RDs as to how they should monitor, implement and support the process. RJ expressed concern that it was not clear what was causing difficulties in some of the divisions.

RM gave the example of VATUK, where she and VATUK staff had originally not realised the implications of the new policy for tower validations. She felt that although the policy had been publicised, the details of the implementation had not been made widely known and had therefore been misinterpreted. RolC said that the issues had been made clear, and that the details of implementation were for the divisions to determine. Both agreed that although the message had been given out, the communication did not seem to have been as effective as it should have been. RJ and RolC both commented on the amount of support that divisions were requiring in order to implement the new policy.

RolC confirmed that achieving basic competencies on tower leads to the award of the S1 rating, and the student can then control at any airport except a designated major airport, which will require additional training and endorsement on the local procedures, though still at an S1 level. The S1 can then train on Approach control under supervision, so that the S3 examination is the test of competence on Approach.

The possibility of opening up Sweatbox to the Observer rating for practical tower training was discussed. RossC had previously expressed concern that this might lead to divisions insisting on an unreasonable amount of time spent on Sweatbox before a trainee was allowed online, which would negate one of the aims of the new policy. RolC has advised that there would be clear standards which prevent excessive restrictions being put in place. RossC has asked Richard Critz to modify Sweatbox to allow Observer access for training. RolC supported this, and pointed out that Sweatbox allows assessment of competencies without having to depend on the vagaries of online traffic.

## **8) Service Delivery Standards**

RolC has posted a draft document on the BoG mailing list. Local policies must not exceed the time limits set in the standards. RM requested clarification of what the time limit actually measured, whether it was the time a student spends consolidating their current rating prior to starting training for the next rating, or the time from achieving one rating to sitting the assessment for the next one. RolC explained that the time period was the minimum from achievement of one rating to undertaking the next assessment, so that the student has had adequate experience and training, and Training Departments are not subject to frivolous early requests. RossC and DK raised the need to limit the maximum number of hours required prior to starting training for the next rating. As this topic is likely to require lengthy discussion it was agreed that it would be continued further on the BoG mailing list. RolC will lead on this.

RossC left the meeting at 2215z

## **9) VAs and VSOAs**

KR opened a discussion on the possibility of opening special operations to fictitious entities e.g, MetroAir would like to carry out fire-fighting and SAR. It was agreed that this would be acceptable as long as pilots realised they would not necessarily get any priority over other pilots. There should be no simulation of warlike or illegal activities. It would be good to have more special operations interacting with civilian ATC, as this adds interest for the controllers and other pilots. KR will look at developing LOAs appropriate to such activities.

KR raised the issue of multiple VAs simulating a single real world airline, and whether this was causing any problems. There was general support for continuing this policy. VATSIM should not be responsible for determining which of various VAs should be an official VATSIM partner. RolC felt that VATSIM does have a duty of care towards established VAs, but others felt that established VAs are unlikely to be threatened by new ones unless their situation is already unstable. A brief discussion ensued on what VATSIM could provide for partner VAs, including a new website with greater interconnectivity, and involvement with the MITRE project.

## **10) Managing disruptive pilots**

KR spoke about the problems involved in managing pilots who are deliberately disruptive, and at what stage such pilots should be permanently excluded from the network. RJ explained the origin of the DCRM system, but said that the lack of "sentencing guidelines" has resulted in inconsistency in decision-making between DCRMs, and a general reluctance to give expulsions. A discussion ensued about how a schedule of penalties could be implemented, including the possibility of expulsion for habitual offenders. NB will investigate this further.

KR left the meeting at 2236z

NB raised the issue of admissibility of evidence from chatlogs other than on the VATSIM network (e.g. MSN) in the disciplinary process. During discussion, RM, RolC, NB, and MZ felt that it was not feasible or appropriate to extend the scope of the disciplinary process to conversations occurring outside the VATSIM network. RJ suggested that evidence from external chatlogs could be used as supporting evidence, but could not be used alone as a basis for a disciplinary decision. DK and FH felt that members whose behaviour outside the network is prejudicial to VATSIM, such as harassment of other members, should come within the disciplinary process. Following discussion it was agreed that the policy would remain that only evidence from the VATSIM network could be used in the disciplinary process. Behaviour outside the network that was possibly serious enough to justify expulsion will be referred to the founders on a case-by-case basis, and is not within the scope of section 6 of the Code of Regulations.

**11) Strategic plan and marketing**

DK and FH will be having discussions on this, and bring their proposals to the BoG mailing list and to the next BoG meeting.

**12) A.O.B.**

NB reminded governors that it was important they and other VATSIM staff have an overt presence on the network, to ensure visibility and availability to the members.

The meeting was closed at 2252z

Ruth McTighe  
22nd January 2008