



MEDIA STATEMENT

18 MARCH 2010

SACAA UPDATE STATEMENT ON GEORGE AIRPORT

Media statement
For immediate release

Midrand - Following an Airlink accident that took place at the George Airport in December 2009, the SACAA's Accident and Incident Investigation Division had to evaluate all possible factors that could have led to the incident. One of the factors that had to be considered was the effect, if any, that the runway surface could have played on the high speed friction coefficient of the runway. This was crucial because from the evaluation of the flight data recording of the accident aircraft; it appeared that there was nothing wrong with the aircraft that could have led to the accident. The investigators then had to focus on evaluating whether the runway surface could potentially have been the problem.

In the meantime and in order to ensure safe use of the runway; the SACAA issued a NOTAM which restricted the use of the George Airport in wet conditions. Based on preliminary results of the tests conducted, the SACAA then reassessed the restrictions and decided that commercial operators will be allowed to use the runway in wet conditions, provided that the aircraft type can safely take off and land with a 30% reserve distance available for the existing runway length. This enables any aircraft equipped with fully functional thrust reverse and anti-skid braking systems to safely stop on the runway with minimum risk in the event that any adverse friction condition is encountered.

Follow up tests results, by Comair, were within limits (only +6% of the allowable +10%) for the landing distance required but exceeding the braking distance required for aborted take off test by 28% from the calculated distance. It would appear that the main problem encountered was the formation of water puddles on the runway mid section which caused the anti skid braking system to disengage at those locations and not the surface macro texture as alluded to in an independent report by the Airlink insurance underwriters.

ACSA has proposed that, in view of the limited time available before the FIFA World Cup, rather than just attempting to fix the localised effects encountered during the test and waiting for international professional opinion on the subject of runway macro texture to be concluded, they would resurface the entire runway during the coming

week or two using open structure course aggregate slurry. However, this would depend on the availability of a suitable contractor and would most probably be done at night in order not to interfere with operations. The current NOTAM will remain effective until the runway friction and water drainage has been tested after completion of the work.

Whilst, this is a temporary measure aimed at ensuring safety, the SACAA would like to point out that the accident report has not been finalised and can therefore not comment further on this, thereby prejudging possible findings. At this stage it is also not a foregone conclusion that the runway surface texture was the major cause of the December accident.

Notwithstanding, the SACAA holds the view that runways in SA are generally in a good state and compliant with the ICAO physical requirements. It should be noted that runway surface texture is a recommendation and not a standard. There is also no particular specification for runway construction material and composition. The SACAA inspects runways for physical layout, markings and friction coefficient. The Authority does not inspect runways for, among others, aggregate composition and compaction as this is a very specialised field and vary from one location to the next depending on usage, weight, ambient temperature, rainfall, etc. This responsibility is left to service provider and its contractors to decide on what is best under what circumstance. The SACAA's interest is the resultant outcome, i.e. safe facilities.

-ENDS-

About the SACAA:

The South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) was established on 1 October 1998 following the enactment of the South African Civil Aviation Authority Act, No.40, in September of the same year. The SACAA promotes and maintains a safe, secure and sustainable civil aviation environment, by regulating and overseeing the functioning and development of the industry in an efficient, cost-effective, and customer-friendly manner according to international standards.

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