

Airspace Change for Toronto Area, and more to come

On 5 July, 2007 there will be change in the classification and size of certain airspace near Toronto. Currently, the Terminal Control Area (TCA) extends to 26 nm with a floor of 3,500 feet ASL up to 12,500. The TCA is Class C mode C, meaning a clearance and a mode C transponder is required to enter.

A new ring of airspace will extend from 26 nm to 65 nm with a floor of 6,500 feet ASL up to 12,500. This airspace will be Class E mode C, meaning there is no requirement to contact ATC for a clearance to enter, but a mode C transponder will be required to fly through this new segment of airspace.

The change came about because of an ongoing debate between Transport Canada and NAV CANADA concerning the need for and timing of airspace changes. NAV CANADA procedures routinely cause airliners to fly at relatively low altitudes as they approach or depart Toronto and Hamilton. Consequently these high speed aircraft are forced to exit the protection of Class C or B airspace, where a combination of mandatory transponders, airborne collision avoidance systems and air traffic controllers watching all traffic on their radars help keep metal separated. The airspace outside of the TCA and lower than 10,000 feet does not require a transponder and pilots do not have to talk to anyone. Consequently, the airliners are mixing it up with some aircraft that are invisible to both the on board detection systems and NAV CANADA's radar, except perhaps for some primary targets at times.

Of course, the simple solution, one that is strongly pushed by COPA, is to keep the airliners higher. There should be no need for any high speed aircraft to be at 7,000 feet (500 feet separation from the floor of the airspace) 65 nm from Toronto, unless of course it was crashing. In today's environmentally aware society, airliners should be higher for as long as possible. And with all the technology that NAV CANADA has at its disposal, they should be able to use the existing airspace more efficiently. But, as the manager of Canada's airspace, NAV CANADA claims that it cannot do better. A combination of departing traffic climbing out above and mixing of traffic transiting to and from several area airports results in some aircraft being held at lower altitudes.

NAV CANADA had already decided to perform a comprehensive and lengthy airspace review but they were delaying its start because their personnel were heavily involved in changing the BC lower mainland airspace. To hurry things along, Transport Canada served notice on NAV CANADA in July 2006 that they had to fix the problems. The notice was perceived by NAV CANADA as direction that they must put revised airspace in place in advance of a comprehensive risk assessment and mitigation exercise that would be performed in an Aeronautical Study, so they responded in October with a proposal to be implemented in May 2007 that would see Class C, mode C airspace extending out to 65 nm. The shape was complicated, consisting of four wedges of airspace to protect the "bedpost" arrival fixes into Pearson. This is when COPA became aware of the issue. To that point, there had been some general discussion with the gliding

community because of an incident involving a near miss, but no one from the GA world was consulted about the size or classification of the airspace.

The size and shape of the proposed airspace was bad enough, but designating it as Class C would almost certainly have sterilized a huge amount of southern Ontario airspace from the VFR traffic. As has been experienced on several occasions, NAV CANADA has denied access to the existing TCA because of staff shortages, particularly on summer weekends when our sector is most active. This massive increase in airspace where a clearance is required to get in would not be addressed with sufficient staff. In over ten years of trying, NAV CANADA still has not met its staffing targets in many areas.

COPA went to work on both NAV CANADA and Transport Canada, pointing out that the proposed solution may solve one problem but create many other safety problems for our sector due to the size, shape and restrictions that would be imposed. We also pointed out that the Class C solution was overkill. The perceived issue was one of the airliners being able to detect all traffic when they are transiting Class E airspace. This can be achieved with Class E, mode C. Following some discussion, an agreement between NAV CANADA and Transport Canada was reached for the interim solution as described at the beginning of this article. For our members, there will be little impact. If you are equipped with a transponder, there is no impact, unless of course it is unserviceable. For those not equipped, you will still be free to navigate as long as you stay below 6,500 feet ASL.

This interim solution does not solve problems in the Hamilton area, where a combination of no terminal airspace and a small control zone leaves airliners exposed for a considerable amount of time while arriving or departing. An interim solution for that area involves publishing arrival routes on the VTA so that VFR pilots can avoid these routes whenever possible.

So, here is what is planned. NAV CANADA is in the process of creating an updated VTA for Toronto on which the new airspace and the arrival routes and fixes for Hamilton will be depicted. The CFS and the VNC will also be modified and all should be in place prior to the 5 July implementation date. NAV CANADA will conduct a series of briefings wherever they can get groups together. COPA wants to cooperate in order to ensure that everyone is prepared for this change. We have offered to put NAV CANADA in touch with our Flights to arrange meetings for this Spring and we also offered our newspaper and web site for dissemination of information. NAV CANADA will also release an Aeronautical Information Circular that will be available on their web site http://www.navcanada.ca/ContentDefinitionFiles/Publications/AeronauticalInfoProducts/AIP/Current/PDF/EN/part_5_aic/5aic_eng.pdf or http://www.navcanada.ca/ContentDefinitionFiles/Publications/AeronauticalInfoProducts/AIP/Current/PDF/FR/part_5_aic/5aic_fre.pdf.

It should also be emphasized that there is no change to the exemption for gliders that can now operate in transponder airspace without a transponder. This exemption as well as other issues will be examined as part of an Aeronautical Study that will be commenced in the near future for all of the airspace extending throughout southern Ontario. COPA will

be active in this study to investigate ways to address the issues other than grabbing more airspace. In the meantime, keep an eye on our web site and newspaper for meeting times and attend one of the briefings. In addition to explaining why the changes are needed, NAV CANADA will explain how they manage the flow of traffic, including VFR, in and around Toronto, and how you can help to make the flow as smooth as possible.