



**Simplifying Internet communications for the air transport community**  
Future directions for aviation's own domain name structure

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This document is intended to be of interest to all those involved with IT development and marketing management within the air transport industry. Its purpose is (1) to demonstrate the benefits to the industry of having its own unique Internet domain; and (2) to offer examples of how the logic and predictability of the naming structure might be extended throughout the air transport community to streamline and synthesize cross industry communications.

In order to ensure that the structured naming convention becomes a lasting success, help is needed from experienced aviation and IT industry professionals. If you would like to participate in building the naming conventions or receive more information, please contact [aero.enquiries@sita.aero](mailto:aero.enquiries@sita.aero).

“We don’t know what the Web is for, but we’ve adopted it faster than any technology since fire.”\*

## Introduction

In March 2002, SITA launched .aero – the world’s first industry-based top level Internet domain name. In its first year of operation, more than 1,000 aviation companies registered over 3,000 domain names.

With secure, intra-industry communications more easily facilitated, the technology is now in place to allow registrants to offer innovative Internet-based services for the benefit of passengers, cargo-handlers and other air transport customers.

The .aero naming structure is sponsored, operated and maintained by SITA on a not-for-profit basis on behalf of the air transport community. The objective is to establish global standards through Internet technologies to improve the efficiency, safety and ease of air transport worldwide. And to do so through domain names that make sense to the industry and the consumer.

In addition, .aero has been introduced to protect existing air transport industry branding, give the industry control over its own top level domain; create an effective and easily understood Web naming structure; and improve security, particularly in the handling of business-to-business applications.

Only qualified members of the aviation community are allowed to use the .aero naming convention – it is not available to the general business community, nor to the public. Those applying for any .aero domain name are required to fit within one of 19 registrant groups, defined by SITA in collaboration with representative aviation community associations and organizations. As a result, cyber squatting and name conflicts are avoided. The effect is to maintain a tight focus on enhancing the community’s Web presence – to the benefit of industry players and to the considerable potential benefit of passengers.

SITA is advised, and the domain is monitored, by the Dot Aero Council (DAC) – a body that includes representatives from ICAO, IATA, Airports Council International (ACI) and a number of stakeholders in aerospace, air freight and general aviation, including the Federation of Airline General Sales Agents (FAGSA) and the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA).

During its short life, the World Wide Web has changed the way we communicate with each other. It has brought peoples together from across continents, democratized information and created massive opportunities for companies to get closer to their customers.

But with almost 32 million domain names currently registered, the Web has also become massively crowded. Search engines have become a vital tool in finding a site – but even Google, reading more than 3,083 million Web pages, is not infallible. And guesswork is of less and less use. For example, www.sas.com is not the Scandinavian airline but the software services company; www.saa.com is not South African Airways but Southern Auto Auction in the US.

Hence the opportunity for .aero. Working alongside existing .com and .country domains, it provides a structured, logical and unique environment in what is often a congested and difficult-to-access online world.

The ATA/IATA Joint Passenger Services conference in October 2002 endorsed the use of two-character airline designator codes, followed by .aero, as a means for travellers to gain quick access to airline websites (see page 14). Airports Council International (ACI) has also endorsed a fully predictive naming convention for the use of three and four letter location codes. With the protection afforded by the .aero domain structure, names become entirely predictable.

But the opportunities go far deeper than just making it easier for visitors to find a company's website. And that is the purpose of this paper.

Above all, this is a community resource, managed by aviation for aviation – focused on enhancing communications for the benefit of all stakeholders in air transport worldwide.

## The origins of the air transport naming structure

The decision to create a shared communications structure, taken in 1949 by 10 European airlines and one US airline with the formation of SITA, was made to eliminate 'excessive delays' and benefits the public through speedier handling of reservations.

Increased collaboration across the industry was also fostered by the creation of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in 1947 under the auspices of the United Nations (succeeding an earlier body whose origins went back to the earliest days of passenger flight), as well as the International Air Transport Association (also succeeding an earlier body).

ICAO, IATA and SITA agreed on the need for industry standards for both message content and protocols. Discussions resulted in the introduction of agreed designator systems for the industry in the early 1950s. These are now managed by ICAO, IATA and the ATA. They are based on:

- two-character airline designators (e.g. LH for Lufthansa)
- three-character airline codes (e.g. AMR for American Airlines)
- three-and four-letter location identifiers for airports (e.g. LHR for London-Heathrow and EDDC for Dresden)
- flight number identifiers (e.g. BA724)
- office function designators (e.g. OZ for Operations Management)
- usage of seven-character "teletype" addresses for messages (e.g. LHROZLH).

Few other industries have introduced a comparable level of inter-working and common procedures, with the possible exception of financial services, which developed the SWIFT telecommunications network for banking transactions.

### A community resource

With the introduction of the .aero domain, however, a new world of communication becomes possible – allowing a predictable, easy-to-remember and rapid means of communicating or accessing information over Internet-enabled technologies, using desktop or laptop computers, PDAs, cell phones and other, yet to be invented, mobile devices.

Registration and use of .aero domains does not interfere with existing domain name structures. In particular, it does not conflict with the use of country names. This is important to air transport businesses with a well-established Internet presence via the company name and country domain name. So visitors who key in xyz.aero might then be relayed automatically through to xyz.country domain, offering the best of both worlds: a simple and predictable approach for new visitors alongside a known and accepted approach for those already in touch with the site.

## Today: delivering user-friendly access to information

The strategic purpose behind the introduction of the .aero domain system is to use established industry codes to provide access to information quickly and accurately via a Web-enabled device.

This means defining guidelines applicable to the various aviation sectors – whether the user is an employee of the company, a supplier, a partner, a competitor, or a customer. It results in predictable domain name usage – particularly in second and third level domain naming structures.

One example of the benefits of a structured naming convention can be found in the route currently required to access an airline's reservation website, compared with a simpler addressing convention using the .aero naming structure. For example:

- Qantas: [https://www.Qantas.com.au/fflyer\\_ir1.html](https://www.Qantas.com.au/fflyer_ir1.html) would become <https://rm.qf.aero>
- Royal Jordanian: <http://reservation.rja.com.jo/hfhtml/rjavf.html> would become <http://rm.rj.aero>
- Lufthansa: [https://www.Lufthansa.com/aerodyn/fb\\_main.aero?pos=DE&l=en&p=fly](https://www.Lufthansa.com/aerodyn/fb_main.aero?pos=DE&l=en&p=fly) would become <https://rm.lh.aero>

The benefits of such an approach to airline reservation pages are significant. It makes the process of booking a flight online far easier: potential customers need only know the two-letter airline designator and the recognized convention of adding "rm" before the airline code to gain immediate access to any airline reservations desk. No more scouring of search engines, no more navigation required through home pages.

### Getting down to business

Difficulties encountered through website management are also removed – of particular benefit to business-to-business (B2B) Web relationships.

For example, many software firms and application providers develop business software accessing Web-based data. But their software can be rendered useless when websites are indiscriminately changed (new path, new Web page), until corrections are put in place. This creates a reactive atmosphere, rather than one in which developers can trust a Web path to reach required business critical information.

The adoption of the predictive naming structure offered by .aero means that users of applications can conduct business normally and with confidence, without "breaks" in service when someone elsewhere in the organization changes a URL without due warning and preparation. It also becomes easier for automated applications to be programmed to search out other required applications – an issue that is likely to grow in importance as software agents become more widely used.

The first and most obvious step to take in establishing the .aero naming convention or industry websites has been to use the long-established two-character airline designators as a second level domain name. Hence examples such as ba.aero, nw.aero and cx.aero.

These designators are used to identify the airline itself and almost every element of airline operation. They include the airline's flight identifiers and the airline's office function designators (OFD) to identify an operational entity or office.

ICANN granted .aero approval to use two character second level names as a crucial exception: two-character names are not generally allowed for specialized top level domains, in order to avoid confusion with the two-character country codes assigned by the International Standard Organization (ISO) (such as DE for Germany or BI for Burundi). As a result and from the outset, the .aero Domain Management Policy reserved identifiers and pre-allocated them to the relevant airlines.

The use of two-character airline designators for second level names was then endorsed by airlines as a Recommended Practice (RP1784) at the ATA/IATA Joint Passenger Services conference in October 2002 (see page 14).

### Branding and e-mail conventions

Airline designators can be used simply to brand a website, as has already been implemented by some airlines. However, RP1784 also sets out guidelines for structuring the third level domain:

- names at third level consisting of one or two characters are reserved for OFD codes, as defined in the IATA Airline Coding Directory, e.g. fm.ba.aero for British Airways' freight system application
- names at third level with three or more characters are open for individual registration by the airline, for example cubic.cx.aero for Cathay Pacific's passenger reservation system application.

RP1784 also recommends a naming convention for e-mail addresses. This is set out as follows:

- three-letter location identifier code
- two-letter office function code (OFD)
- the "@" symbol
- two-character airline designator code
- "."
- the top level domain (aero).

Examples of this include laxll@ua.aero (United Airlines' lost luggage facility at Los Angeles International Airport) and hkgaa@cx.aero (Cathay Pacific's accounting department at Hong Kong International Airport).

## Tomorrow: the extended benefits of naming conventions

From usage of two-character airline designator codes, it is only a short step to giving airline and airport staff, as well as working colleagues and customers, direct access to data related to individual airline flights.

This can be simply achieved by using the flight number to locate information from the airline's own data systems.

To protect these options, domain names in the form of aannnn.aero (the relevant two alphanumeric characters, followed by up to four digits – as used in flight numbering) have been reserved in the .aero registry system. When made available for registration later in 2003, these flight number domains (e.g. BA724) would enable travellers to quickly access information about a current or future flight by accessing the airline's website from a PC or suitable mobile device.

By registering all of its flight numbers, e.g. xx1000 to xx4999, an airline could put in place a simple, rapid and highly effective way for passengers to access valuable information about departures and arrivals.

For example, a passenger needing to make a connection forgets the time of her return flight. It's a Sunday so she cannot go to a travel agency and does not know the number of the airline reservations office. Using the Web connection on her mobile phone while ordering a snack, she taps in xy123.aero.

Within a couple of seconds, complete flight details are displayed. Problem solved before she's even ordered her meal.

### It goes further

Customers might also be able to complete transactions related to a specific flight and date, including:

- availability of seat(s)
- booking
- ticket purchase via a secured transaction
- flight alteration.

Such simple and logical access to information, using well-understood and existing industry codes, would vastly improve passenger communication with the airline. It would raise the airline's profile with passengers and streamline the booking process – helping fill more seats at a negligible marketing cost.

As has been outlined above, a naming convention for the use of .aero by airlines is being established – with far reaching possibilities and many benefits for both airlines and passengers.

## Adopting naming conventions industry wide (1)

The advantages are not restricted to airlines – airports can also add value to their services.

A naming convention for airports is being implemented in co-operation with Airports Council International, the body that represents 1,500 airports worldwide. More than 115 airports, including Dublin ([www.dub.aero](http://www.dub.aero)), Las Vegas ([www.las.aero](http://www.las.aero)), London City ([www.lcy.aero](http://www.lcy.aero)), Prague ([www.prg.aero](http://www.prg.aero)) and Sydney ([www.syd.aero](http://www.syd.aero)) have already registered.

For those who register their name at second level, the convention is clear:

- xxx.aero
- where “xxx” is the three-letter IATA location identifier
- where “.aero” is reserved for the air transport industry.

Standardization through the convention could allow simplified passenger access to:

- flight schedules
- ground transportation
- parking
- accommodation
- shops, including duty free
- general airport information.

Many other opportunities for the simple transference of information would become self-evident as soon as the conventions were in full operation. Some would have a major impact on passenger information provision. Others would offer incremental improvements – such as the opportunity for airports to allow easy access to information for people welcoming and accompanying passengers.

Anticipating the demand for greater functionality, the .aero domain management policy has been invoked to protect so-called “city-pairs” – representing the departure airport and the arrival airport (e.g. “cdg-gva” for flights from Paris Charles de Gaulle to Geneva) – and using the three letter airport location identifiers. An agreement clarifying whether the registration should be effected by the origin airport or the destination airport has yet to be defined.

Use of the naming conventions in this manner has the potential to become a standard and easily remembered way to locate flights scheduled between two cities (large airports, in terms of number of passengers, are generally allocated user friendly codes) and then to access the details for a specific flight.

### Airport domains for professional use

The benefits of domain name structure would not apply only to passengers. Important aspects of airport activity could take advantage of a simplified access to airport information, including:

- operational information for airlines (scheduled and unscheduled) and business aircraft operators
- all suppliers and service providers involved in passenger handling, cargo, maintenance, repair, fuel, etc.

While some airports register their three-letter IATA location identifiers following the convention xxx.aero, the registration cannot be guaranteed at all times because of naming conflicts with other members of the air transport community.

However, there is an alternative option available that is wholly predictable and where no such conflicts occur:

- aaa.airport.aero
- where “aaa” is the three-letter IATA location identifier
- where “airport” is reserved exclusively for airports within .aero
- where “.aero” is reserved for the air-transport industry.

Following the example of RP1784 endorsed by airlines, SITA is proposing that all one and two character codes are reserved for airport industry use. For example, in the case of x.aaa.airport.aero and yy.aaa.airport.aero the one and two character “x”, and “yy” characters would be reserved for future use by airports.

Names of three or more characters would also be available for airport use, for example:

- fuel.gva.airport.aero
- cargo.hkg.airport.aero

This level of predictability would be of particular value for business transactions and other professional requirements. For example, a pilot would be able to send an e-mail to fuel@gva.airport.aero or fuel@lhr.airport.aero with certainty.

The use of standardized names, like “fuel” or “cargo” would be encouraged by SITA and the DAC through the involvement of industry representatives.

A similar structure could also be used for four-letter ICAO airport codes. This would deliver the same benefits to other airports and airfields – and would also allow general aviation to utilize the naming structure.

## Adopting naming conventions industry wide (2)

Other areas of the industry – from civil aviation to individual pilots – can also add value to their work through use of the naming conventions.

### Civil Aviation

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) of each country member of ICAO is another eligible member of the aviation community for whom adoption of an agreed .aero naming convention may offer useful benefits. The ISO two-character country codes (cc) could also be used in a structured naming scheme (e.g. cc.dgca.aero).

As a result, SITA is proposing a new common structured naming convention for civil aviation Internet addresses of ICAO member countries. This would be used in parallel with each DGCA's current Internet address as .aero recommended practice. The structure would be set out as follows.

#### (1) DGCA .aero standard:

The two letter ISO country-code would be used to name DGCA websites and e-mail addresses.

For example:

- cc.dgca.aero
- where "cc" is the ISO country code
- where "dgca" is reserved within .aero exclusively for civil aviation within .aero
- where ".aero" is reserved for the air transport industry.

(2) DGCA agreement to reserve name space for future use:

In a similar fashion to RP1784, all one and two character codes could be reserved for future cross civil aviation industry use. For example: x.cc.dgca.aero and yy.cc.dgca.aero, where the one and two character "x", and "yy" characters are reserved for future cross-civil aviation use.

(3) Development of office function codes as e-mail handles:

SITA will be discussing with ICAO whether there is an opportunity to embrace DGCA office functions within the naming convention, to allow standardization of office function codes for e-mail addresses (that run in parallel to existing names).

For example:

- secretarygeneral@ch.dgca.aero, or
- secgen@ch.dgca.aero

### **Aerospace and Business Aviation**

New initiatives for this sector are currently being researched – and do suggest a strong potential level of interest. The objective is to create a platform for communications between members of the air transport community that, through its predictability and as a result of the controlled registration processes, confers a degree of security unavailable through normal commercial domain-naming processes.

For example, e-commerce standards for defining website/Internet applications will drive down IT support costs and facilitate the use of data transfer on a global basis, due to reduced costs for smaller entities.

Business aviation would also benefit in a similar way: reduced costs would allow smaller operations, without an IT staff, to participate in industry standard processes that may have been cost-prohibitive in the past.

### **Pilots and Other Aviation Professionals**

Similarly, e-mail addresses are often used for the implicit identification of the sender. Within the controlled names space it is possible to ensure that the holders of the domain names are eligible members of the community. For example, .aero domain name holding pilots could communicate with various service providers, who would be able to confer a degree of “trust” by means of the e-mail address of the sender.

A convention in the form of myname.pilot.aero would seem the logical way to use such a namespace.

## After tomorrow – the pervasive Net

The key to the future for .aero is the advantage provided by predictability.

Without doubt, a host of additional opportunities will develop as the naming infrastructure developed out of the .aero top level domain takes root and as the Internet becomes as all-pervasive as electricity – always available and part of the background.

ICAO have a vision of the future role of Internet services in assuring safe and secure communications, for example, between the ground and aircraft in flight. The pervasive Internet would suggest that the aircraft itself becomes a network. Engines might have their own IP address, allowing remote “conversations” between the engine and ground maintenance. The naming structure of .aero will provide the framework for that degree of connectivity.

Another example: Web-based directory services typically serve as a “Yellow Pages” for users on a network. They are evolving into multi-company mechanisms, where geographically dispersed project teams can find other contacts, quickly and simply. Typically, however, problems arise over accuracy due to personnel changes or to changes to URLs for data repositories. This can all too easily lead to delays and missed communication issues.

Structured namespaces within the .aero domain could automatically feed relevant Web directory(ies). Future standards will alleviate some of the issues identified, and ease the burdens upon IT support staff to broadcast changes to business partners.

Additional certainty could be given to existing levels of trust in the identity of .aero transmission through overlaying or adoption of a public key infrastructure and the issuance of digital certificates.

## Conclusion

The hierarchical structure of the Internet domain-naming process provides an almost infinite degree of capillarity. The .aero initiative will seek to evolve this advantage in line with community requirements and opportunities.

Existing levels of predictability are already making a difference. The potential for cross-industry communications is clearly set out, to the benefit of air transport companies, organizations, associations and individuals within the industry. Commercial benefits are also available by facilitating contact between airlines/airports and passengers.

Pervasiveness, consistency and trust are central to the use of the Internet and the Web. The adoption of the .aero naming conventions will facilitate those processes within the air transport industry, based on the predictability of a domain naming structure that is managed by and for the air transport community.

In order to ensure that the structured naming convention becomes a lasting success, help is needed from experienced aviation and IT industry professionals. If you would like to participate in building the naming conventions or receive more information, please contact [aero.enquiries@sita.aero](mailto:aero.enquiries@sita.aero).

## RECOMMENDED PRACTICE 1784 STRUCTURED DOMAIN NAMES

RECOMMENDED that, Members adopt an industry standard practice for structured Domain Names to address Internet communications between airlines and their business partners.

### 1. PURPOSE

1.1 The structured domain name convention is a global industry addressing schema standard for inter-company messaging and application communications. This structure can be used in parallel with, or in lieu of, existing domain and e-mail names. Industry standard domain names at each level and the conventions of constructing structured domain names are published in the IATA Guidelines for Structured Domain Names, published separately.

### 2. OBJECTIVES

This structured domain name convention defines a global naming structure within commercial aviation which enable users to locate businesses and specific functions within each business.

The objectives of this recommended practice are to:

- provide a platform for industry standard addressing between applications that rely on Internet domain names;
- establish standard predictable names for locating sites and addressing messages;
- provide implicit verification of identity when used in a controlled domain name space (e.g. .aero);
- provide continuity between airline Type B addressing and Internet technologies;
- allow parallel use of existing infrastructure and names;
- permit free allocation of 3rd level and greater domain names according to internal needs.

### 3. DOMAIN NAMES

3.1 In the Domain Name System (DNS) naming of computers there is a hierarchy of names defined in Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA) RFC 1591. The root of system is unnamed. There are a set of what are called "top-level domain names" (TLDs). These are the generic TLDs (EDU, COM, NET, ORG, GOV, MIL, and INT, BIZ, INFO, NAME, PRO), the two letter country codes from ISO-3166 and new sponsored and controlled TLDs (AERO, COOP, MUSEUM).

3.2 A hierarchy of names may be created under each TLD. Generally, under the generic and country-code TLDs the structure is very flat. That is, many organisations are registered directly under the TLD, and any further structure if any is left to the individual organisations.

## 4. STRUCTURED DOMAIN NAME DEFINITION

4.1 Internet standard domain names at each level must conform to existing designated industry codes. Codes specified in domain name structures will be interpreted to be the code as assigned in the following standards:

- Resolution 762 — Airline Designators;
- Recommended Practice 1704 — Office Function Designators for Passenger and Baggage Handling;
- Resolution 763 — Location Identifiers.

4.2 Domain names shall be constructed, from right to left as follows:

- TLD;
- Airline designator;
- 1 character and 2 character strings are reserved for future industry use.

### 4.3 Structured Domain Name Levels

| Domain Level           | Structure   | Example                         |
|------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| Top Level Domain (TLD) | .TLD  | AERO                            |
| 2nd Level Domain (2LD) | airline-designator.TLD                                  | BA.AERO                         |
| 3rd Level Domain (3LD) | one-character.airline-designator.TLD                    | Reserved                        |
|                        | two-character.airline-designator.TLD                    | Reserved                        |
|                        | three or more-characters.airline-designator.TLD         | Open for individual carrier use |
| E-mail Conventions     | leading-five-teletype-characters@airline-designator.TLD | HQGRZ@UA.AERO                   |

## 5. DOMAIN NAME STRUCTURE

### 5.1 Top Level Domain (TLD)

5.1.1 This convention applies only when the 2LD and 3LD Domain Names are controlled as specified below.

### 5.2 Second Level Domain Names (2LD)

5.2.1 The Second Level Domain name for each airline must be the assigned two character airline designator code as defined in Resolution 762.

5.2.2 Where controlled duplicate airline designator codes have been assigned, the corresponding two character code Second Level Domain name will only be assigned to the principal code holder.

### 5.3 Third Level Domain Names (3LD)

5.3.1 The assignment and use of domain names on 3rd and higher level shall be managed and assigned directly by each airline concerned. To allow for further harmonisation of domain names between airlines, the following procedure is recommended for coordination and standardisation of Third Level and higher Domain Names.

**5.3.2** One and two character strings are reserved for Office Function Designator Codes.

**5.3.3** Conventions for the use of one or two character 3LD names are co-ordinated by the Electronic Commerce Distribution Group (ECDG). Agreed conventions for third level domain names are published in the IATA Guidelines for Structured Domain Names.

**5.3.4** 3 character and longer strings are open for individual airline designation in 3LD names.

## **6. E-MAIL**

It is recommended that the following convention be used to establish e-mail addresses using office functions and location identifiers. The standard structure for e-mail addresses is only applicable to general office functions. Other naming conventions may be used to address messages to individual recipients.

**6.1** Office function e-mail addresses shall be constructed from left to right as follows:

- three letter location identifier code;
- the two letter Type B office function code;
- the "@" symbol;
- two character airline designator code;
- "," a period;
- the Top level domain.

Example:

GVAHQ@YY.AERO

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## About SITA

SITA is the world's leading provider of integrated information and telecommunications solutions to the air transport industry. With over 50 years' experience, SITA now has around 740 members and 1,800 customers including airlines, airports, travel distribution and computer reservation systems, governmental organizations, aerospace and air-freight companies. Further information can be found at [www.sita.aero](http://www.sita.aero).

Further information on the .aero top level domain and a full list of registered names and active .aero websites is available at [www.information.aero](http://www.information.aero).

Research and content: Joseph Blanchard,  
Martin Gaskell, John Pawlicki, Marie Zitkova  
Text: Gerald Oliver  
Contact address: [aero.enquiries@sita.aero](mailto:aero.enquiries@sita.aero)  
Feedback form: [www.information.aero](http://www.information.aero)

### Guide to abbreviations

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| <b>ACI</b>   | Airports Council International                        |
| <b>ATA</b>   | Air Transport Association (of America)                |
| <b>DAC</b>   | Dot Aero Council                                      |
| <b>DGCA</b>  | Directorate General of Civil Aviation                 |
| <b>ICAO</b>  | International Civil Aviation Organization             |
| <b>FAA</b>   | Federal Aviation Administration                       |
| <b>FAGSA</b> | Federation of Airline General<br>Sales Agents         |
| <b>IATA</b>  | International Air Transport Association               |
| <b>ICANN</b> | Internet Corporation for Assigned<br>Names & Numbers* |
| <b>ISO</b>   | International Standards Organization                  |
| <b>NBAA</b>  | National Business Aviation Association                |

\* ICANN is the non-profit corporation formed to assume responsibility for the IP address space allocation, protocol parameter assignment, domain name system management, and root server system management functions previously performed under U.S. Government contract by IANA and other entities.



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**SITA**

**For further information,  
please contact SITA:**

**Global Headquarters**  
26 Chemin de Joinville, B.P. 31,  
1216 Cointrin, Geneva, Switzerland  
tel: +41 22 747 6000  
fax: +41 22 747 6133  
e-mail: [aero.enquiries@sita.aero](mailto:aero.enquiries@sita.aero)

**Americas**  
3100 Cumberland Boulevard,  
Suite 200, Atlanta, GA 30339, USA  
tel: +1 770 850 4500  
fax: +1 770 612 2265  
e-mail: [info.americas@sita.aero](mailto:info.americas@sita.aero)

**Asia Pacific**  
11 Loyang Way, Singapore 508723,  
Republic of Singapore  
tel: +65 6545 3711  
fax: +65 6548 2635  
e-mail: [info.asiapacific@sita.aero](mailto:info.asiapacific@sita.aero)

**Europe**  
Capital Place, 120 Bath Road,  
Hayes, Middlesex UB3 5AN,  
United Kingdom  
tel: +44 (0)20 8476 4500  
fax: +44 (0)20 8730 1337  
e-mail: [info.eumea@sita.aero](mailto:info.eumea@sita.aero)

**Middle East and Africa**  
Bachoura, Khandak El-Ghamik,  
Daoud Ammoun Street, SITA  
building, P.O. Box 11-6524,  
Beirut, Lebanon  
tel: +961 (1) 657200  
fax: +961 (1) 655951  
e-mail: [info.mea@sita.aero](mailto:info.mea@sita.aero)

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