

# Recent Developments and Experiences

## Transport Accident Investigation Commission New Zealand

### *Introduction*

The upcoming year is going to be a busy and challenging one for the Transport Accident Investigation Commission (TAIC). We have new staff in two key management roles, and a significant project underway to renew IT systems together with many of our internal processes. Our investigative work continues nevertheless; at 5 May 2021, we had 23 inquiries open, mostly in the aviation mode (11, with six each in rail and maritime).

### *Organisational development*

TAIC has drafted a renewed four-year strategic plan, which we present to the Minister of Transport and Parliament every three years. The draft is with the Minister for his comment.

We have proposed that our strategic direction remains substantially unchanged over this planning cycle:

- Responding to technological change – capacity to adapt to the changing digital environment and disruptive technology (for example, unmanned transport).
- Strengthening human and information capital – ensuring we have the workforce and the IT systems to respond to the technological challenge.
- Development of a contemporary knowledge transfer system – integration of investigation and inquiry processes with technology assets (hardware and software), supporting creation, use, and management of knowledge; and finally, the transfer of our knowledge to others within the transport system so they can use it to create their own knowledge.

One area of increased attention, however, is strengthening our ability to respond to a major accident. We intend to increase our participation in New Zealand's government-wide planning for major events and to improve our internal processes and capacity to respond.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not changed our overall strategic direction. We have seen no significant effects on the numbers of accidents we are investigating, or on their type as result of the pandemic; however, we continue to monitor for effects. A particular area of interest is the potential effect of lower flying hours on the currently of pilots' skills. As commercial aviation returns to more normal level, we will be looking closely at aviation notifications for indications of emerging safety issues.

## Staff changes

TAIC is undergoing a period of change in senior management. Our Chief Executive, Lois Hutchinson, is retiring after 15 years of outstanding service to TAIC and to New Zealand's transport safety system. She has been instrumental in bringing a focus on system-wide safety issues to investigations and is widely acknowledged for her achievements in the role.

TAIC's board has appointed a new Chief Executive, Martin Sawyers. Martin is a lawyer who has held an extensive range of governance roles in both the public and private sectors. In recent years Martin has mainly worked in the area of regulation. We look forward to Martin joining us in June.

We noted in our last update that we were welcoming a new Chief Investigator of Accidents, Harald Hendel. Harald joined us in December 2020 and has been active in engaging with the New Zealand regulators and other industry groups.

New funding (described below) has allowed us to increase staff numbers. We are currently recruiting a human factors adviser so we have in-house expertise to support our inquiries; we plan also to bring on board another staff member to boost our capability in quantitative analysis. In total, the new establishment increases from 27 to 32.

## **Increased funding**

As we have previously indicated, TAIC received additional funding from 2020/21. Our Crown funding increased to \$7.30 million from \$5.52 million in 2019/20. The purpose of the funding is to support our strategic direction with its focus on knowledge transfer and organisational resilience, and to relieve cost pressures.

A project group is currently establishing user requirements and considering solutions for new systems and processes. We are aiming to have most of the planning work completed by the end of the financial year (30 June 2021).

The funding is also allowing us to increase staff numbers as noted above.

## **Case studies and challenges**

### Training

Although COVID-19 has not changed what we do, or the strategic direction for the organisation, it has presented challenges for how we train investigators. Usually, investigators begin their training with us by attending a Cranfield University fundamentals course in the UK, and later an advanced course. This is not feasible with the current travel restrictions, and so we are looking at other options, including enhanced on-the-job training.