

Link to article: [London City Airport Launches Its Remote ATC Tower - Simple Flying](#)

London City Airport Launches Its Remote ATC Tower

- by **Jake Hardiman**

London City Airport (LCY) announced this morning that it had achieved a world first in terms of air traffic control. Specifically, it has become the first major international airport where ATC is completely controlled on a remote basis. It has done so by constructing a new tower, which stands 50 meters (164 feet) tall.



LCY's new remote ATC tower, as seen behind two BA CityFlyer Embraer jets.
Photo: London City Airport

A new, digital tower

London City's pioneering new tower allows controllers 115 km (70 miles) away in Swanwick, Hampshire, to dictate movements at the airport. Swanwick is home to NATS (National Air Traffic Services), which is the UK's primary ATC provider.

According to the airport, controllers in Swanwick gain a 360-degree, real-time view of London City thanks to “*sixteen high-definition cameras and sensors mounted on the mast.*” They can also overlay digital data onto their screens to “*provide an ‘enhanced reality’ view.*”



The new system had already been subjected to intensive testing during lockdown. It was developed by the Digital Air Traffic Solutions branch of Swedish aerospace manufacturer Saab. Of course, Sweden is already home to several smaller airports with this technology. These include [Scandinavian Mountains Airport](#) (SCR), which opened in 2019.

London City Digital Tower

The Digital Tower

How many positions?
There are 3 positions:



Ground
Controller



Air
Controller



Coordinator
Position



The controllers use the images from 16 high-definition cameras to safely and securely manage London City Airport's air traffic from a location away from the airport.



All operational data is transferred via secure, super-fast connections to a custom-built digital tower operations room at NATS' Swanwick air traffic control centre.



14 high-definition screens form a panoramic moving image, giving the controllers a superb view of the entire airport, with the ability to integrate real-time operational data.



London City Airport is the first major international airport in the world to be fully controlled by a digital air traffic control tower.

Movements are now dictated from an operations room in Swanwick. Photo: London City Airport

The airport views the new tower with pride and optimism. Indeed, Alison FitzGerald, its Chief Operating Officer, stated that:

“We are immensely proud to become the first major international airport to adopt this pioneering technology. This investment in smart infrastructure will help us meet future growth in passenger demand, improve air traffic management and give us enhanced capability as aviation bounces back from the pandemic.”

Gearing up for a summer recovery

The launch of the new tower could not have come at a better time for the airport. Indeed, it is hoping that, within a few weeks, the remote ATC will be handling a significantly larger number of flights than currently. It states that the new digital structure:

“... will help the airport meet an expected surge in demand for flying during the summer season as COVID-19 restrictions are eased from Monday 17th May.”



The new tower is set to process a flurry of additional aircraft in the coming months as restrictions ease. Photo: London City Airport

Indeed, several key [domestic routes from the airport have already restarted](#). These see airlines such as BA CityFlyer and Loganair serve the likes of Dundee, Edinburgh, and Glasgow. However, May 17th is set to be the date when international leisure travel from the UK is permitted once again. This will likely prompt a flurry of additional activity in terms of flights to European destinations, such as [BA CityFlyer's new service to Gibraltar](#).

Part of a wider infrastructure upgrade

The new tower is actually one of several infrastructure enhancements that have recently taken place at London City. Last summer, the impacts of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic had initially [halted its development plans](#). After all, the lack of passengers rendered an expansion of its existing terminal somewhat unnecessary at the time. However, the airport was eventually able to push on, and reached a key milestone by the end of the year.



The new taxiway is another part of LCY's infrastructure developments. Photo: London City Airport

Specifically, it announced in December 2020 that it had [completed a project including the installation of new stands](#). The development also allowed it to open a new taxiway, eliminating the need for aircraft to backtrack along the runway. Overall, it seems to be a very exciting time for LCY's infrastructure. The airport will certainly hope that as many passengers as possible can experience the benefits of the development in the coming months.