

# Strengthening Aviation Through Collaboration

March 26, 2025



*ICW brings sector leaders together at the House of Lords, UK to shape the future of aviation through trust-based partnership – insight from Frank Lee, Chief Executive Officer, ICW*

**Lord Hannett, Chairman of ICW was a guest speaker at a recent House of Lords event, bringing together key influencers in the Aviation sector, to address the need for great collaboration in managing critical projects delivering the industry's infrastructure.**

**Amongst those attending the Institute for Collaborative Working (ICW) event were senior representatives from a range of leading British aviation organisations including the Royal Air Force, Ministry of Defence and the National Air Traffic Service (NATS) who were sponsoring the event.**

**Other attendees were major project organisations, specialising in aviation infrastructure delivery including Mitie, UST, Babcock, BSI, Balfour Beatty, Amey, Costain, Associated Asphalt, Sopra Steria, Indra, Tetra Tech, Mott MacDonald, Morgan Sindall, Raytheon, Leonardo, CGI, Frequentis, Leidos, and BT.**

---

The aviation sector has long stood as a symbol of innovation, safety, and international cooperation—none of which would be possible without a deeply embedded culture of collaboration. This principle took centre stage at the Institute for Collaborative Working's (ICW) recent Aviation Sector Collaboration Luncheon, held in the historic Attlee Room at the House of Lords.

Sponsored by NATS, the event brought together senior leaders from across the aviation industry—including representatives from Leidos, Indra, BT, and many other ICW members—to reflect on

how collaboration has shaped the sector's past and why it remains crucial to its future.

ICW's mission is to promote structured collaboration that delivers economic, social, environmental, and organisational value. Events like this are where that mission comes to life—not only by fostering dialogue, but by empowering people. These moments enable individuals at all levels to develop collaborative thinking, connect with peers across traditional boundaries, and strengthen the soft skills—like empathy, listening, and trust-building—that are essential for navigating today's complex project landscapes.

By organising such gatherings, ICW brings together diverse perspectives that inspire fresh thinking, uncover new opportunities, and accelerate innovation. They challenge organisations *and individuals* to reflect on how well they're collaborating—and encourage them to aim higher, go further, and embed collaborative behaviours into their culture and practice. These events are not just about networking—they're strategic tools for shaping a mindset where collaboration becomes a core capability, delivering meaningful and measurable outcomes.

---

## The House Of Lords Westminster: A Historic Venue, A Legacy of Leadership



In his first formal engagement as Chairman of ICW, Lord John Hannett opened the luncheon by honouring the legacy of Clement Attlee, whose post-war government laid the groundwork for modern British aviation through the nationalisation of air transport and support for international cooperation, such as the Berlin Airlift.

"It seems fitting that we hold this first aviation collaboration event in this very room," Lord Hannett remarked, setting the tone for an afternoon focused on legacy, leadership, and looking ahead.

---

## Aviation: Built on Collaboration

Few industries are as fundamentally interconnected as aviation. Airlines, airports, air traffic controllers, manufacturers, construction, facilities management, technology providers, logistics firms, regulators, and governments must all work in harmony to deliver safe, efficient services. In such a complex ecosystem, success depends not only on technical expertise, but also on strong relationships and aligned goals.

Lord Hannett reminded attendees that aviation has long been a pioneer in structured collaboration, with the first formal audit under PAS 11000 taking place at NATS in 2008. This early leadership laid the foundation for today's ISO 44001 standard for collaborative working.

"Aviation was one of the first sectors to truly embrace structured collaboration," he said. "But it started in aviation at NATS."

Collaboration has enabled the aviation sector to grow into a globally connected, safe, and innovative industry—by aligning diverse stakeholders around shared goals and complex operational challenges. That same mindset is increasingly vital for practitioners navigating multi-stakeholder projects, and for teams balancing safety, sustainability, and customer experience.

---

## Why ICW Brings Aviation Leaders Together



The role of ICW in convening sector leaders is not just about networking—it's about enabling the kind of collaboration that drives system-wide progress and personal growth. Aviation is inherently interdependent; no single organisation—or professional—can tackle the industry's challenges alone.

From modernising infrastructure and achieving net zero to responding to disruption and risk, the future of aviation will be shaped by partnership. Events like this provide the space for open, strategic dialogue across organisational and competitive boundaries. They help leaders build trust, identify shared

challenges, and explore joint solutions.

For the individual practitioner, these moments also offer a unique opportunity to develop confidence in collaborative engagement, refine their communication skills, and contribute to meaningful conversations that can influence the direction of the sector.

---

## **Collaboration in the Spotlight: Heathrow and the Case for Unity**

Considering the recent operational challenges at Heathrow Airport and the sheer scale of the proposed third runway project, the importance of collaboration has never been more apparent.

Aviation is a system of systems. When something goes wrong—be it a technical fault, weather disruption, or operational breakdown—the ripple effects are immediate and far-reaching. The recent disruptions demonstrate how interdependent the system is, and how quickly public trust, safety, and commercial outcomes can be affected when coordination falters.

And how important it is to getting back up and running after disruptions. An irony not lost, given the recent disruption to Heathrow Airport, following a fire at an electrical sub-station, powering the airport. And the ensuing global impact.

When things go wrong—whether it's a technical failure, air traffic control issue, weather disruption, or security incident—no single organisation can resolve it alone. It takes coordinated action between multiple players and having the systems processes competencies and culture in place that foster strong relationships and mutual trust so that information flows freely, decisions are made quickly, and organisations can act as a team under pressure.

Now consider the third runway—a multi-billion-pound infrastructure project involving government departments, regulators, airport authorities, airlines, investors, environmental groups, local communities, engineers, and supply chains. There is no roadmap for a project of this complexity that doesn't demand deep, structured collaboration.

Without shared objectives, transparent planning, aligned risk management, and mutual accountability, such a venture is vulnerable to delay, conflict, and reputational damage. But with structured collaboration—based on trust, data-sharing, and common purpose—it becomes not only possible but transformative.

As Lord Hannett noted, “Many of you will play a role in such an undertaking, and you will need to effectively collaborate together.”

For those involved, this isn't just about delivering a new runway—it's about building and sustaining the human relationships and cross-sector skills needed to ensure long-term success. From programme managers and engineers to community liaison officers and sustainability leads, everyone has a part to play.



## Supporting Future-Ready Partnerships



Beyond reflecting on achievements, Lord Hannett used the event to launch two new ICW initiatives designed to deepen collaboration across the aviation ecosystem:

### **1. Leading Edge Service**

This new offering allows organisations already accredited to ISO 44001 to go further by verifying that their collaborative systems are delivering tangible added value—either at an organisational level or within a specific project.

“No one in aviation has yet reached this level,” Lord Hannett said. “So, who will be the first?”

This represents not only a challenge for organisations, but a call to action for project professionals to step up, demonstrate leadership in collaboration, and drive best practice from within.

### **2. SME Support Initiative**

Recognising the vital role of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the aviation supply chain, ICW is offering free guidance, tools, and training to help SMEs build collaborative capability.

This initiative is aligned with the upcoming Procurement Act 2025, which aims to increase SME participation in public procurement.

By supporting SME readiness, ICW is nurturing a more inclusive and resilient aviation ecosystem—while giving individual professionals in smaller organisations the tools to partner with confidence.

---

## Collaboration as a Cultural Imperative



While many organisations claim that collaboration is part of their culture, Lord Hannett offered a challenge: “If they’re not here, they’re not truly walking the talk.”

True collaboration requires more than intention—it must be embedded into systems, behaviours, and decision-making. It requires personal commitment from practitioners at every level, who understand that collaboration is a skillset—one that can be learned, honed, and applied in real-time.

ICW supports this by providing standards, leadership forums, and practical tools to help organisations move from aspiration to action. Through events like the Aviation Sector Luncheon, ICW creates platforms where these principles come to life—where industry leaders and individuals alike can share experiences, develop partnerships, and shape the future of the sector together.

---

## Looking Ahead

Aviation stands at a pivotal moment. From sustainability pressures and infrastructure demands to geopolitical instability and emerging technologies, the path forward is complex—but also full of opportunity.

As Lord Hannett concluded:

“Please have a great lunch today. Enjoy your visit to the House of Lords. Take the opportunity to network with old friends—and try to make some new friends as well.”

It was a fitting reminder that in collaboration, it all begins with a conversation.

By continuing to bring the sector’s leaders together, ICW ensures that the aviation industry is not only reacting to change—but shaping it. And, perhaps more importantly, that every practitioner—regardless of role or rank—has a place in that conversation.

**The Institute for Collaborative Working (ICW) is a for purpose, not for profit Cross-Industry membership organisation at the forefront of delivering better ways of working. Frank Lee is Chief Executive Officer and spearheads the organisation's mission to embed structured collaboration across sectors and champion partnership as a driver of sustainable, resilient, and high-performing organisations**

**You can connect with Frank Lee through his LinkedIn page [here](#). And to find more about the work done by the ICW click [here](#).**