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APPARATUS, METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR PROVIDING EVALUATION AND/OR OPTIMIZATION OF TRAJECTORY MANAGEMENT FOR GROUND AND AIR SERVICES

Abstract

An advisory module may include processing circuitry configured to receive data indicative of internal factors and external factors related to route optimization of a combined route of a subject. The combined route may include an air segment and a ground segment, and at least some of the external factors may include dynamic parameters that are changeable while the air segment or ground segment is being transited by the subject to a ground objective. The processing circuitry may be further configured to generate a guidance option to deliver the subject to the ground objective based on integration of the internal factors and the external factors to optimize a route to the ground objective, and provide a graphical representation of the guidance option along with comparative data or context information associated with the route.

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Background/Summary

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] Example embodiments generally relate to the aviation industry and, more particularly, relate to the ability to provide comparative economic and technical evaluations of routes associated with in-flight aircraft in combination with ground transport or services such as, for example, in relation to emergency services that include a ground segment in addition to the air segment.

BACKGROUND

[0002] The market for mobile device-based applications is currently populated with a large number of products that provide pilots with improved means for traditional flight planning (e.g., ForeFlight, Garmin Pilot, Jeppesen TC, JeppVFR, WingXPro, Fly!, My Wingman, ARINC Direct, Aero Vie, Xavion, RocketRoute, iFlightPlanner, FltPlan.com, and others). These products perform a useful function in improving the traditional, largely manual means of planning flights through electronic applications (apps) on both mobile devices and in flight deck forward field of view displays. These apps streamline the pre-flight planning process through simplified access to integrated forms of weather, airspace, and aircraft data, as well as through automating calculations formerly requiring manual processing.

[0003] However, even though each of these products uses various different pieces of information to improve route planning capabilities, and some can even purport to generate “optimized” routing services for some parameters, the products generally do not enable continuous or periodic updating of flights in real time. Moreover, these products also generally do not provide any means by which to evaluate a degree of optimization offered by the service, or the impact of optimization of one parameter relative to the costs imposed by such optimization on other parameters. As such, not only do the products leave much to be desired in terms of real-time integration of data to account for dynamically changing airspace constraints and traffic flows, but they also leave the optimization of flight trajectory objectives as a faith-based exercise that a pilot must accept without any proof or context to enable full appreciation of the actual value of the optimization that is purported to be provided.

[0004] In some situations, an in-flight aircraft may have need of support services or other activities that involve land-based assets that are directly tied to the operations going on in the air. For example, emergency or abnormal operating events may certainly trigger a need for services on the ground including routing, coordination, cost management, etc. However, routine needs for ground services could also occur for which coordination with air operations would be desirable. However, there is currently no means by which to coordinate ground and air services, much less a means by which to do so while considering cost (including costs across multiple dimensions) while also providing the ability to evaluate the costs and make decisions accordingly.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF SOME EXAMPLES

[0005] Some example embodiments may therefore be provided to overcome some of the limitations described above within the context of a system that provides improved connectivity to support real-time, optimal management of flight paths in the context of various objective (or “cost”) parameters including both air and ground services. In this regard, for example, some embodiments may provide “proof points” for the evaluation of optimized flight paths and ground

traffic guidance/organization.

[0006] In one example embodiment, an advisory module is provided. The advisory module may include processing circuitry configured to receive data indicative of internal factors and external factors related to route optimization of a combined route of a subject. The combined route may include an air segment and a ground segment, and at least some of the external factors may include dynamic parameters that are changeable while the air segment or ground segment is being transited by the subject to a ground objective. The processing circuitry may be further configured to generate a guidance option to deliver the subject to the ground objective based on integration of the internal factors and the external factors to optimize a route to the ground objective, and provide a graphical representation of the guidance option along with comparative data or context information associated with the route.

[0007] In another example embodiment, a method for providing advisories is provided. The method may include receiving data indicative of internal factors and external factors related to route optimization for a combined route including an air segment and a ground segment to deliver a subject to a ground objective. At least some of the external factors may include dynamic parameters that are changeable while proceeding to the ground objective. The method may further include generating a guidance option associated with the combined route of the aircraft based on integration of the internal factors and the external factors to optimize the combined route for a user-selected cost parameter, and providing a graphical representation of the guidance option along with comparative data or context information associated with the user-selected cost parameter for each of the air segment and the ground segment.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING(S)

[0008] Having thus described the invention in general terms, reference will now be made to the accompanying drawings, which are not necessarily drawn to scale, and wherein:

[0009] FIG. 1 illustrates an aircraft moving through the coverage areas of different base stations over time in accordance with an example embodiment;

[0010] FIG. 2 illustrates a block diagram of a system for employing a trajectory management module that employs proof points data in accordance with an example embodiment;

[0011] FIG. 3 illustrates the trajectory management module according to an example embodiment;

[0012] FIG. 4A illustrates operation of the trajectory management module to provide advisory services with proof points data for an air segment in accordance with an example embodiment;

[0013] FIG. 4B illustrates operation of the trajectory management module to provide advisory services with proof points data for a ground segment in accordance with an example embodiment;

[0014] FIG. 5 illustrates an example of comparative data that may be used to augment trajectory management services as proof points data in accordance with an example embodiment;

[0015] FIG. 6 illustrates proof points data being provided relative to candidate options provided for a combined (hybrid) route including an air segment and a ground segment in accordance with an example embodiment; and

[0016] FIG. 7 illustrates a block diagram of a method for performing an example advisory related function with proof points data in accordance with an example embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0017] Some example embodiments now will be described more fully hereinafter with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which some, but not all example embodiments are shown. Indeed, the examples described and pictured herein should not be construed as being limiting as to the scope, applicability or configuration of the present disclosure. Rather, these example embodiments are provided so that this disclosure will satisfy applicable legal requirements. Like reference

numerals refer to like elements throughout. Furthermore, as used herein, the term “or” is to be interpreted as a logical operator that results in true whenever one or more of its operands are true. As used herein, the terms “data,” “content,” “information” and similar terms may be used interchangeably to refer to data capable of being transmitted, received, processed and/or stored in accordance with example embodiments. Thus, use of any such terms should not be taken to limit the spirit and scope of example embodiments.

[0018] As used herein, the terms “component,” “module,” and the like are intended to include a computer-related entity, such as but not limited to hardware, firmware, or a combination of hardware and software. For example, a component or module may be, but is not limited to being, a process running on a processor, a processor, an object, an executable, a thread of execution, and/or a computer. By way of example, both an application running on a computing device and/or the computing device can be a component or module. One or more components or modules can reside within a process and/or thread of execution and a component/module may be localized on one computer and/or distributed between two or more computers. In addition, these components can execute from various computer readable media having various data structures stored thereon. The components may communicate by way of local and/or remote processes such as in accordance with a signal having one or more data packets, such as data from one component/module interacting with another component/module in a local system, distributed system, and/or across a network such as the Internet with other systems by way of the signal. Each respective component/module may perform one or more functions that will be described in greater detail herein. However, it should be appreciated that although this example is described in terms of separate modules corresponding to various functions performed, some examples may not necessarily utilize modular architectures for employment of the respective different functions. Thus, for example, code may be shared between different modules, or the processing circuitry itself may be configured to perform all of the functions described as being associated with the components/modules described herein.

Furthermore, in the context of this disclosure, the term “module” should not be understood as a nonce word to identify any generic means for performing functionalities of the respective modules. Instead, the term “module” should be understood to be a modular component that is specifically configured in, or can be operably coupled to, the processing circuitry to modify the behavior and/or capability of the processing circuitry based on the hardware and/or software that is added to or otherwise operably coupled to the processing circuitry to configure the processing circuitry accordingly.

[0019] As mentioned above, the preparation of a flight plan, which includes the selection of a route will, if the route is followed, define corresponding costs in terms of consumption or generation of certain parameters or values that are likely to correspond to the route. These costs in terms of consumption or generation of parameters may include time consumption, fuel consumption, carbon generation, contrail generation, turbulence, and/or the like. Prior to beginning a flight, the likely costs associated with the flight plan can be calculated based on current conditions. Moreover, applications can be employed to suggest improvement or even optimization of a route in order to minimize or maximize any desired parameters. The suggested or optimized route may then be presented to the user for acceptance and adoption.

[0020] However, it should be understood that many so called “optimized” routes could exist between two points over time due to the potential for dynamic changing of conditions. Thus, it should be appreciated that the calculation of an optimized route is really just the calculation of a theoretical optimized route for a given instant in time based on the parameters in existence (or defined) for the route at that given instant in time. As the route progresses, and current as well as forecast conditions change, the optimization actually also very likely changes. Accordingly, real time updating of conditions and optimization options is an important enabling objective to the improvement of flight planning. However, the potential for improvement does not stop there.

[0021] As noted above, optimization calculation is currently a faith-based exercise that often lacks

any context information to validate the value of the optimization suggested. In this regard, a route optimized for time typically calculates the route (again for current conditions) that would take the least time and then displays the suggested (i.e., time-optimized) route. Similarly, a route optimized for fuel consumption would typically calculate the route (as always, based on current conditions) that would generate the least fuel consumption, and display the suggested (i.e., fuel-optimized) route. In either case, the parameter-optimized route may be accepted or adopted by a pilot or a flight operations dispatcher without appreciating the degree of improvement achieved relative to other routes, much less the impact of optimizing one parameter on other parameters. Accordingly, it should be appreciated that the provision of comparative data that can provide context information on the degree of improvement or impact on cost and/or other parameters for an optimized route would be of significant value. In relation to this disclosure, that comparative data and context information may be considered to be “proof points.” However, this concept of proof points need not be limited to merely routing of the aircraft while in-flight. Accordingly, example embodiments further extend this concept to include ground side operations and services. Moreover, example embodiments can be extremely flexible due to the fact that real time communication with the aircraft is possible in-flight. Thus, for example, if an emergency or other situation occurs for which ground services are also desirable, example embodiments further provide the diagnostics of routing and ground facility suitability to enable decisions to be made for routing all the way to the ground destination. Although this can be particularly useful for emergency (either for people or the aircraft) situations, a combined air and ground capability for providing comparative data and context information to enable decision making for routing all the way to a ground destination may also be provided for routine maintenance, delivery or travel.

[0022] Example embodiments may therefore provide the capability to deliver dynamically updateable proof points using real time data during flight, that also take into account the real time data and parameters associated with other actively unfolding flights for provision of routing and optimal trajectory management in the air. However, example embodiments also deliver dynamically updatable proof points using real time situationally specific ground side routing and/or services management in order to further increase the value of the improvements provided by example embodiments.

[0023] Example embodiments provide a system that utilizes real time connectivity to a plurality of in-flight aircraft, and real time updating of changing flight conditions to provide an in-flight service that delivers not only optimized routes, but dynamically updated optimized routes that further include evaluation information in the form of comparative data and context (or diagnostic) information to demonstrate the degree of optimization relative to other options and/or the impact of optimizing one parameter on other parameters. The system also considers a ground objective and provides optimized routes and/or asset coordination for meeting the ground objective while also providing evaluation information for the same. Thus, the real time connectivity aspect of example embodiments may be a backbone upon which other evaluation tools may be built since the real time connectivity not only enables accurate route optimization, but enables setting (or changing) the ground objective dynamically and being responsive to the same. Additionally, since the options presented are aimed to be provided with information that enables the user to make decisions based on the comparative data and context information, the system also needs to be responsive to the option selected (or changes in option selections) by the user. Accordingly, some example embodiments may implement a computer executable application or module, employed via air-to-ground, air-to-air, or satellite communication-based aircraft connectivity that further integrates to the internet and/or terrestrial based communication. The application or module may employ methods for dynamic flight path management and ground traffic management for computing and optimizing flight paths and ground traffic paths to a selected ground objective, and for providing evaluation techniques to further provide comparative data and context information as described above. The capability disclosed herein may be implemented using trajectory optimization methods

employing (for example) kinetic, kinematic, point-mass, as well as six-degree-of-freedom path models.

[0024] Within the aviation industry, the process for management of dynamically interacting flight paths may be referred to as CR5DT, translated to mean Continuous Replanning of Five-Dimensional Trajectories for continuous replanning in five dimensions. As noted above, some example embodiments may employ a “Flight 5D” application module (or Destination Certainty application module), which is configured to employ the technologies described herein, but which is further augmented with a proof points module configured to probabilistically provide evidence of the optimization (and degree thereof) of a current flight path relative to other options, or to demonstrate evidence that another route may actually be optimal relative to the current route based on some changes to the conditions that were used to calculate the current route. The probabilistically driven evaluation and comparative module (which may also be referred to as a proof points module) provides the pilot with periodically updated advisories that include context information and comparative data to demonstrate the degree of optimization relative to other options (or at least a current or reference option). The proof points module may be built onto a continuous replanning module that is configured to account for both the external and internal factors that bound the future flight path solution space, based on the ability, through a real time aviation connectivity solution, to continually ingest updated forecasts of all factors affecting all of the future of any given flight path. The approach accounts for external factors, which may include airspace exclusions, architectures and procedures; winds and temperatures aloft; storms, icing, volcanic ash and turbulence; and other air traffic, including air traffic management flow control initiatives for congestion management. Internal factors accounted for may include pilot or operator policies and preferences for desired time of arrival, avoidance of turbulence or icing or other flight hazards, fuel burn minimization, and cost minimization. Additional internal factors include current and future aircraft weight, speed, configuration of landing gear and controls, and effects on performance of abnormal conditions such as failure of an engine or other aircraft system such as cabin environmental, hydraulics, electrical, communications systems, or other factor affecting otherwise normal flight operations. Collectively, the combination of these variables and constraints create a flight path management challenge that no pilot, flight crew, or fleet manager can continually update to achieve optimal solutions for a complete flight path from origin or current position to destination, during flight. Example embodiments may enable optimization in-flight, and in a dynamic and responsive way, but may further provide the tools to assign a monetary or other demonstrable value to the optimization. Thus, the actual cost savings (in dollars, time, pollution, etc.) may be calculable using example embodiments. The assignment and visualization of an actual value in terms of various types of cost savings can be a powerful behavioral influencer. However, the assignment of such cost can also show an amount of savings that validates the value of the service and, in some cases, can be used as a basis for determining a cost (or price) for the service itself (e.g., by making the cost/price of the service related to the cost savings provided by the use of the service).

[0025] Beyond just calculating optimal solutions in real time, the power of in-flight connectivity further enables example embodiments to demonstrate the degree of improvement offered by potential changes (or the current route) over other alternatives. This comparative and contextual information provision further enables fully informed decision making by the pilot, air traffic controllers, fleet managers, and/or the like. Accordingly, for example, preferences or priorities of the pilot (or others) can supersede optimization in certain instances where the pilot's judgement dictates that the optimization is not worth pursuing due to other considerations that may be known to the pilot. As an example, the pilot may be informed that conditions have developed that have made the flight path previously suggested no longer the most optimal route in terms of fuel consumption. Under normal circumstances where the pilot (or fleet manager) is concerned about managing fuel costs, the pilot may adjust the flight plan enroute in order to adopt a more optimal

route for the current conditions without actually appreciating the degree to which the newly suggested route actually provides improvement. However, if the pilot (or fleet manager) was further informed that the newly suggested optimal route actually saves fuel costs by less than 1%, while increasing the time cost by 8%, the pilot (or fleet manager) may decide that the relatively small increase in fuel economy is more than offset by the large increase in cost in terms of time due to other commitments of the aircraft or the pilot. Thus, the fuel-optimized route may not be adopted in favor of the current route, which is significantly faster and only slightly less fuel efficient.

[0026] However, it should further be appreciated that such comparative data and context information, particularly across multiple parameters, can enable pilots or fleet managers to determine multivariate optimization or select routes that, although perhaps not optimal for any particular individual parameter, are nevertheless quite good at balancing a number of factors. The consequence may be that flight paths are manageable in more practical ways that reduce overall waste and inefficiencies in flight path and airspace performance on balance and across a number of important factors for an individual, group of individuals or organization. Example embodiments described herein enable solutions that can reduce pilot and dispatcher workloads and dramatically increasing fidelity and accuracy of flight path management, while simultaneously enabling informed decisions to be made relative to understanding and managing the costs of decisions being made in real time.

[0027] As noted above, the flight path management aspect of example embodiments may only be a portion of the overall capabilities that the system provides. In this regard, example embodiments may not only include a module that manages airborne trajectories and can provide proof points for airborne travel, but may further provide guidance and coordination of services for a ground objective that is either known before takeoff or that can be selected (on an emergent or elective basis) by an operator. This coordination of air and land services in a dynamic and responsive way, along with the provision of context information and comparative data so that the operator is not merely provided a guidance instruction, but may be provided options that enable consideration of multiple cost factors or other considerations to achieve or reach the ground objective. Thus, example embodiments may provide guidance and proof points that extend over an air segment and a ground segment of an overall or combined route to the ground objective.

[0028] Example embodiments may be implemented in a variety of computing and communications architectures involving airborne and ground (cloud)-based alternatives. A proof points module could be operated as a Web service or desktop application if supplied with all the data required for the computational optimization of the flight path and a data communication link to and from the aircraft. The proof points module may be executed on any number of computing platforms, including mobile devices such as smart phones or tablet-based personal electronic devices, or in the avionics panel of an aircraft, or in devices that provide aural, tactile, or visual cues or are “wearable” by pilots. Furthermore, computations associated with flight path optimization and proof points can be effectively conducted in data centers (or the “cloud”) as means of alternative architectures for generating and providing advisories to the pilot or a dispatcher, where the advisories are provided wirelessly to the aircraft while in-flight along with the context information and comparative data described herein and, also provide information to the aircraft (or secondary vehicles) while on the ground until the ground objective is reached. However, computations associated with example embodiments could also or alternatively be performed in the air or as a combination of air and ground executed steps. That said, given the ability for real time connectivity that is advantageously employed in connection with example embodiments, the possibility of minimizing the amount of hardware in the air may be taken advantage of to lighten the weight and cost of equipment that is airborne without sacrificing anything in terms of capability. As such, by employing cloud-based computation and real time connectivity bandwidth-enabled access to the data and information required and the means of computing the data-driven flight path advisories for the aircraft operator and/or ground operators are provided, along with the proof points aspects

described herein to validate the information provided, but also provide context that enables more informed decision making by pilots, air traffic controllers, drivers or a fleet manager instead of blind adoption of suggested routing without full appreciation of the actual savings or costs associated with such adoption. Pilots, air traffic controllers, drivers and/or fleet managers may therefore be provided with continuously updated information about the best heading, speed, altitude, routing, and rate of climb/descent to fly from wherever they are in the airspace, to their primary or alternate destination, and, in addition, provides pilots with comparative data and contextual information that enables the most informed decision making possible regarding the trajectory options among which they can choose or about which they are advised.

[0029] Example embodiments may generate flight trajectory solutions using a computational platform that has sufficient speed and is fed by sufficient data to produce advisory information that is relevant in real-time and in fast-time, and may further evaluate those solutions, also in real-time and in fast-time to provide the proof points-related feedback described herein. Through the integration of a computational platform in a system that includes Air-to-Ground (ATG) 4G LTE WiFi access (for example) and/or ADS-B 978 MHz UAT FIS-B and TIS-B data (for example), example embodiments enable the generation of regular updates to flight path optimizations that satisfy user preferences and policies for path objectives, and demonstrate also the degree of optimization relative to alternative and potentially impacts across multiple factors that are candidates for optimization. An example of an ATG access system that may employ an example embodiment is described below. However, it should be appreciated that example embodiments may also employ air-to-air or satellite components in some cases, either alone or in combination with each other and ATG components.

[0030] In an ATG context, each base station is typically one of a plurality of base stations that are deployed on the ground (or in the air) to be partially overlapping with adjacent base stations to provide continuous and uninterrupted coverage over a particular geographic area. The base stations are interconnected with each other to form a network, and may also be interconnected with other networks via a backhaul network or assembly. Mobile equipment that utilizes the communication network formed by these base stations includes devices on various aircraft. Moreover, the real-time, high bandwidth connection (in both directions) that may be offered by a full duplex ATG system may provide the opportunity for a “streaming black box” that can provide all data (and more) that is normally stored on board an aircraft for safety monitoring to equipment on the ground. Additionally, real-time flight tracking, even at granular levels of data, can be accomplished due to the high bandwidth and real-time connection.

[0031] In some examples, the ATG network may be designed to employ beamforming technology to communicate more efficiently and reliably. In this regard, for example, beams may be formed at or steered to desirable locations within a coverage area of a cell defined by a base station (or an aircraft) to extend range, reduce interference, and provide other enhanced communication capabilities. Whether the beams are steered or formed within this context, the control of the beams may be referred to as beamforming, and may be controlled by a beamforming control module. In some embodiments, the beamforming control module may be provided at mobile nodes of an air-to-ground network (e.g., aircraft), base stations of the network, and or at a network controller either at a central network location or in the cloud. The beamforming control module may utilize position information of both the base stations and the mobile nodes to determine (predictively or in real-time) where to steer beams to ensure continuous communication can be maintained both within an individual cell and when a handover to another cell is desirable.

[0032] In some embodiments, a base station employing beamforming may employ an antenna array to generate (e.g., form) or steer beams in the direction of the target device, enhancing the coverage range when the location of the device is known relative to the base station. When the location of the device is not known to the base station, then a beam may not be formed in the direction of the target device and the coverage range of the base station would effectively be reduced. To address

this potential problem, it may be possible to utilize current and future position information of receiving stations and base stations to facilitate beamforming at either or both ends of the wireless communication links that are to be established.

[0033] In an ATG communications system, the end-user equipment (or receiving stations) may be installed or otherwise present on an aircraft or other aerial platform. Thus, as mentioned above, the utilization of position information may not simply involve knowledge of latitude and longitude, relative positioning, global positioning system (GPS) coordinates, and/or the like. Instead, knowledge of three dimensional (3D) position information including altitude may be required. Speed, course, and any other information descriptive of the current 3D position and likely future positions may also be helpful in some cases. When the 3D position of aircraft (or communication devices thereon) is known at a current time and in future time, this location- and time specific information may be employed by the wireless system to enhance the initial synchronization coverage range by enhancing beamforming. This 5D knowledge may also enhance the ability to track the trajectory of the aircraft and other aircraft to allow fully comprehensive communication of data in two directions to substantially enhance the quality of advisory services that react to real time internal and external factors.

[0034] In some cases, the knowledge of locations of fixed assets (i.e., base station locations) may be known in advance and, for example, may be stored at a location accessible to any or all assets of the network. Knowledge of movable device locations (e.g., aircraft) may be actively tracked for all devices (e.g., all aircraft or other known receiving devices on the aircraft) in the 3D airspace. As an example, aircraft (or devices thereon) taking off from an airport may access and synchronize with a base station near the airport. Once known to the wireless system, each device may periodically transmit position information (e.g., coordinates, altitude, and speed) to the serving base station. The base station may share the position information with a centralized server or other device in the core network, or in the cloud. The centralized server (or other processing device) may then track each device, compare the device location against a database of base stations in the system, and determine when a particular device may be moving into a different base station's coverage area. The device location may be shared with the new base station, and the new base station may then form a directional beam toward the wireless device to share synchronization information.

[0035] Example embodiments may therefore combine knowledge of fixed base stations positions with knowledge of moving receiving station positions (e.g., in 5D) to provide beamforming from both the aircraft (or devices thereon) and the base station when the device has not yet acquired a neighboring base station. Full beamforming coverage benefits may therefore be maintained within an ATG system, reducing the cost of network coverage and improving handoff reliability. The improved gain by using directed beams may enable aircraft to engage in communications with potentially distant base stations on the ground. Accordingly, an ATG network may potentially be built with base stations that are much farther apart than the typical distance between base stations in a terrestrial network thereby increasing the cost effectiveness of the ATG service.

[0036] With the ability to communicate with aircraft (and devices thereon) via focused and high-bandwidth, low latency beams established, communication of data to and from the aircraft can be greatly enhanced. Processing capabilities provided on the aircraft, on the ground, and/or in the cloud, may therefore be similarly enhanced to provide full integration of real time data into trajectory management for continuous replanning of dynamically interacting trajectories for optimal economic and safety related outcomes. The proof points module, which may be configured to further provide context information and/or comparative data associated with optimized route planning (and presentation) may be a component of the trajectory management suite of services that are made available to network devices via a real-time intelligent system for managing assets and providing relevant information thereto while such assets are in-flight. This system may be referred to, or be a portion of, a “Skytelligence®” system.

[0037] FIG. 1 illustrates a conceptual view of an aircraft moving through a coverage zone of

different base stations to illustrate the beamforming aspects that may be integrated into an example embodiment. As can be seen in FIG. 1, an aircraft **100** may be in communication with a first base station (BS) **110** at time t_0 via a wireless communication link **120**. The aircraft **100** may therefore include wireless communication equipment onboard that enables the aircraft **100** to communicate with the first BS **110**, and the first BS **110** may also include wireless communication equipment enabling communication with the aircraft **100**. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the wireless communication equipment at each end may include radio hardware and/or software for processing wireless signals received at corresponding antenna arrays that are provided at each respective device in communication with their respective radios. Moreover, the wireless communication equipment of example embodiments may be configured to employ beamforming techniques to utilize directive focusing, steering, and/or formation of beams using the antenna arrays. Accordingly, for the purposes of this discussion, it should be assumed that the wireless communication link **120** between the aircraft **100** and the first BS **110** may be formed using at least one link established via beamforming. In other words, either the first BS **110** or the aircraft **100**, or both, may include radio control circuitry capable of employing beamforming techniques for establishment of the wireless communication link **120**.

[0038] The first BS **110** has a fixed position geographically and therefore position information regarding the location of the first BS **110** can be known. In some cases, an estimate of the coverage area defining the region in which first BS **110** is capable of providing wireless connectivity to aircraft may also be known or estimable (e.g., at the aircraft **100** and/or at the first BS **110** or another network location). Meanwhile, the position of the aircraft in 3D space may also be known or estimable at any given time (e.g., at the aircraft **100** and/or at the first BS **110** or another network location). Accordingly, flight tracking may be accomplished for UAS/UAV/UAM and other operations via automated airspace management. Furthermore, it should be appreciated that the coverage area of the first BS **110** may possibly be altitude dependent, in some cases. In this regard, for example, the latitudinal and longitudinal coverage area projected onto the surface of the earth for the first BS **110** may be differently sized for different altitudes. Accordingly, for example, based on the known position and coverage characteristics of the first BS **110** and the position information of the aircraft **100** at time $t_{sub.0}$, it may be determinable that the aircraft **100** is nearing or at the edge of the coverage area of the first BS **110** at time $t_{sub.0}$.

[0039] A second BS **130**, which may have similar performance and functional characteristics to those of the first BS **110**, may be located geographically such that, for the current track or trajectory of the aircraft **100**, the second BS **130** is a candidate for handover of the aircraft **100** to maintain a continuous and uninterrupted communication link between the aircraft **100** and ground-based base stations of an ATG wireless communication network at time t_0 . As discussed above, it may be helpful for the second BS **130** to be aware of the approach of the aircraft **100** so that the second BS **130** can employ beamforming techniques to direct a beam toward the aircraft **100** either when or prior to the aircraft **100** reaching the coverage area of the second BS **130**. Additionally or alternatively, it may be helpful for the aircraft **100** to be aware of the existence and location of the second BS **130** so that the wireless communication equipment on the aircraft **100** may employ beamforming techniques to direct a beam toward the second BS **130** either when or prior to the aircraft **100** reaching the coverage area of the second BS **130**. Thus, at least one of the second BS **130** or the wireless communication equipment on the aircraft **100** may employ beamforming techniques assisted by knowledge of position information to facilitate establishment of the wireless communication link **140** between the wireless communication equipment on the aircraft **100** and the second BS **130**. The handover of the aircraft **100** from the first BS **110** to the second BS **130** at time t_0 may be followed by service of the aircraft **100** being provided by the wireless communication link **140** and the second BS **130**.

[0040] In accordance with an example embodiment, a beamforming control module may be provided that employs both 2D knowledge of fixed base station location and at least 3D knowledge

(perhaps 4D or 5D knowledge in some cases) of position information regarding a receiving station on an aircraft to assist in application of beamforming techniques. The beamforming control module of an example embodiment may be physically located at any of a number of different locations within an ATG communication network. For example, the beamforming control module may be located at the aircraft **100**, at either or both of the first and second BS **110** and **130**, or at another location in the network or in the cloud. Similarly, a module or tracking engine may also be located at the aircraft **100**, at either or both of the first and second BS **110** and **130**, or at another location in the network or in the cloud. The module or tracking engine may utilize position information, either independently gathered, or gathered in association with beamforming as described above, to generate and track trajectory information for one or more of the aircraft that are being tracked by the system. Example embodiments may include modules or components that are configured not only to track these trajectories, but to continuously monitor and update possible trajectories associated with one or more of the aircraft so that, for example, optimized routes can be suggested with respect to individually selectable parameters (e.g., time, fuel cost, carbon footprint, contrail generation, turbulence avoidance, etc.). Example embodiments may then further determine (e.g., via utilization of cumulative distribution functions or other probabilistic methods) a degree to which optimized routes are an improvement over other routes and present such information to a viewer (e.g., a pilot, fleet manager or air traffic controller). Thus, example embodiments may provide proof points to demonstrate the comparative value of the solutions generated for aircraft during the air segment of a combined route that also includes a ground segment in order to reach a ground objective.

[0041] FIG. 2 illustrates a functional block diagram of a system that may include an ATG communication network and corresponding terrestrial network or Internet connected network that may employ an example embodiment of a device for continuously planning and evaluating trajectory information and augmenting such information with comparative data and context information using a proof points module of an example embodiment over a combined route that includes an air segment and a ground segment to reach a ground objective.

[0042] As shown in FIG. 2, the first BS **110** and second BS **130** may each be base stations of an ATG network **200**. The ATG network **200** may further include other BSs **210**, and each of the BSs may be in communication with the ATG network **200** via a gateway (GTW) device **220**. The ATG network **200** may further be in communication with a wide area network such as the Internet **230** or other communication networks. In some embodiments, the ATG network **200** may include or otherwise be coupled to a packet-switched core network.

[0043] In an example embodiment, the ATG network **200** may include a network controller **240** that may include, for example, switching functionality. Thus, for example, the network controller **240** may be configured to handle routing calls to and from the aircraft **100** (or to communication equipment on the aircraft **100**) and/or handle other data or communication transfers between the communication equipment on the aircraft **100** and the ATG network **200**. In some embodiments, the network controller **240** may function to provide a connection to landline trunks when the communication equipment on the aircraft **100** is involved in a call. In addition, the network controller **240** may be configured for controlling the forwarding of messages and/or data to and from a mobile terminal on the aircraft **100** and may also control the forwarding of messages for the base stations. It should be noted that although the network controller **240** is shown in the system of FIG. 2, the network controller **240** is merely an exemplary network device and example embodiments are not limited to use in a network employing the network controller **240**.

[0044] The network controller **240** may be coupled to a data network, such as a local area network (LAN), a metropolitan area network (MAN), and/or a wide area network (WAN) (e.g., the Internet **230**) and may be directly or indirectly coupled to the data network. In turn, devices such as processing elements (e.g., personal computers, laptop computers, smartphones, server computers or the like) can be coupled to the communication equipment on the aircraft **100** via the Internet **230**.

[0045] Although not every element of every possible embodiment of the ATG network **200** is shown and described herein, it should be appreciated that the communication equipment on the aircraft **100** may be coupled to one or more of any of a number of different networks through the ATG network **200**. In this regard, the network(s) can be capable of supporting communication in accordance with any one or more of a number of first-generation (1G), second-generation (2G), third-generation (3G), fourth-generation (4G), fifth generation (5G) and/or future mobile communication protocols or the like. In some cases, the communication supported may employ communication links defined using unlicensed band frequencies such as 2.4 GHz or 5.8 GHz. However, communications may be supported by other frequencies in licensed bands additionally or alternatively. Moreover, it may be possible to switch between licensed and unlicensed band communications (and/or satellite communications) under the control of the network controller **240** in some cases. Additionally, in some cases, the ATG network **200** may be augmented by or operate in parallel with an air-to-air or satellite communication system and switching may be performed to handle communications alternately between either the ATG network **200**, the air-to-air system or the satellite communications system in some cases under the control of the network controller **240**.

[0046] The system uses the ATG network **200** for communication with the aircraft **100** (or to communication equipment on the aircraft **100**) while the system interacts over the air segment of the combined route to the ground objective. Thus, for the ground segment, the system further includes a ground network **280**. The ground network **280** may, in some cases, be embodied as or include a terrestrial communication network (e.g., a cellular telephone network) or a satellite network for communicating with a ground vehicle **282** (or the communication equipment in the ground vehicle **282**). Alternatively or additionally, the ground network **280** may include a GPS or other tracking system that can track the ground vehicle **282** (or communication equipment thereon) during progress on the ground segment. In either case, the ground network **280** may include gateways, base stations, and/or the like that are not shown, but otherwise may function similar to those described above except that they are located in a terrestrial or satellite network.

[0047] Within the context of the system of FIG. 2, it should be appreciated that the aircraft **100** could also be the ground vehicle **282** in some cases (e.g., due to taxiing to the ground objective), or the communication equipment that was previously in the aircraft **100** may transfer to the ground vehicle **282** and the ground vehicle **282** could be a separate vehicle in other embodiments. In still other cases, an object, passenger or entity may be a subject that is designated for delivery to or arrival at the ground objective. The subject may be known before the flight of the aircraft **100** or may be determined during the flight. In either case, the subject may be known and identified for delivery to the ground objective. The subject may be in possession of or accompanied by the communication equipment (e.g., a cell phone or other communication device) that is tracked to or delivered at the ground objective such that the same communication equipment is both in the air on the aircraft **100** and also on the ground in the ground vehicle **282**. However, in other cases, different instances of communication equipment (e.g., different cell phones or different communication devices of other types) may participate in the air and ground segments. In such a case, the combined route may be identified by a combined route identifier that authorized parties can access to accompany the subject toward the ground objective.

[0048] Thus, for example, a first piece of communication equipment on the aircraft **100** may initially include or interface with the TMM **275** (via the ATG network **200**) during the air segment. The TMM **275** may define options with corresponding proof points for the air segment and the ground segment and at least the options and proof points for the air segment may be provided to the first piece of communication equipment until the aircraft **100** lands to complete the air segment. While in the air, the first piece of communication equipment may monitor or create the combined route identifier and the operator thereof can receive options with proof points and make selections to achieve progress toward completing the air segment. Upon landing the aircraft **100**, a second piece of communication equipment may be granted access to the combined route identifier and take

over tracking and/or communication for monitoring of continued progress toward the ground objective while selecting and/or executing options (which are again accompanied by proof points) for the ground segment.

[0049] As indicated above, a trajectory management (e.g., Flight 5D application) module may be employed on electronic equipment at either or both of the network side or the subject side for both the air and ground segments of the combined path in example embodiments. Thus, in some embodiments, the trajectory management module may be implemented in a receiving station on the aircraft (e.g., a passenger device or device associated with the aircraft's communication system). In some embodiments, the trajectory management module may be implemented in the network controller **240** or at some other network side entity. In some cases, the trajectory management module may be implemented in communication equipment on or in the ground vehicle **282**. Moreover, in some cases, the trajectory management module may be implemented at an entity located in the cloud (e.g., at a location that is operably coupled to the ATG network **200** via the Internet **230**). Accordingly, FIG. 2 illustrates a trajectory management module or component (TMM) **275** at each of the aircraft **100**, the network controller **240**, the ground vehicle **282** and the Internet **230**. However, it should be appreciated that example embodiments could include only one such component (at any one of the locations). Alternatively, the system could operate in a distributed fashion with multiple TMM **275** at any (or each) of the locations shown. Additionally, it should be appreciated that an instance of the TMM **275** may be (in some cases) located on each aircraft that is configured to communicate with the ATG network **200** and/or on each device (e.g., cell phone or other communication equipment) that can operate in accordance with example embodiments. In this regard, for example, proof points could be enabled by downloading and running an application that configures the corresponding device to include an instance of the TMM **275**.

[0050] FIG. 3 illustrates the architecture of TMM **275** in accordance with an example embodiment. The TMM **275** may include processing circuitry **310** configured to receive information indicative of internal and external factors for processing as described herein. The processing circuitry **310** may be configured to perform data processing, control function execution and/or other processing and management services according to an example embodiment of the present invention. In some embodiments, the processing circuitry **310** may be embodied as a chip or chip set. In other words, the processing circuitry **310** may comprise one or more physical packages (e.g., chips) including materials, components and/or wires on a structural assembly (e.g., a baseboard). The structural assembly may provide physical strength, conservation of size, and/or limitation of electrical interaction for component circuitry included thereon. The processing circuitry **310** may therefore, in some cases, be configured to implement an embodiment of the present invention on a single chip or as a single "system on a chip." As such, in some cases, a chip or chipset may constitute means for performing one or more operations for providing the functionalities described herein.

[0051] In an example embodiment, the processing circuitry **310** may include one or more instances of a processor **312** and memory **314** that may be in communication with or otherwise control a device interface **320** and, in some cases, a user interface **330**. As such, the processing circuitry **310** may be embodied as a circuit chip (e.g., an integrated circuit chip) configured (e.g., with hardware, software or a combination of hardware and software) to perform operations described herein. However, in some embodiments, the processing circuitry **310** may be embodied as a portion of an on-board computer, or other device on the aircraft **100**, the ground vehicle **282** or a device at any portion of the ATG network **200** and/or ground network **280**. In some embodiments, the processing circuitry **310** may communicate with various components, entities and/or sensors of the ATG network **200** and/or ground network **280** to receive the external factors.

[0052] The user interface **330** (if implemented) may be in communication with the processing circuitry **310** to receive an indication of a user input at the user interface **330** and/or to provide an audible, visual, mechanical or other output to the user. As such, the user interface **330** may include,

for example, a display (e.g., a touchscreen or other display), a keyboard, a mouse, speakers, one or more levers, switches, indicator lights, buttons or keys (e.g., function buttons), and/or other input/output mechanisms capable of delivering audible, visual, haptic or other outputs. For cases where the ground segment and air segment are split between different devices, the user interface **330** may be a different user interface of each respective one of the different devices. Thus, the user interface **330** may actually be separate from the TMM **275** and/or the device at which the TMM **275** is implemented.

[0053] The device interface **320** may include one or more interface mechanisms for enabling communication with other devices (e.g., modules, entities, sensors and/or other components of the ATG network **200** and/or the ground network **282**, or on the aircraft **100** or ground vehicle **282** itself when the TMM **275** is instantiated on the aircraft **100** or ground vehicle **282**). In some cases, the device interface **320** may be any means such as a device or circuitry embodied in either hardware, or a combination of hardware and software that is configured to receive and/or transmit data from/to modules, entities, sensors and/or other components of the host device or the ATG network **200** or ground network **282** that are in communication with the processing circuitry **310**.

[0054] The processor **312** may be embodied in a number of different ways. For example, the processor **312** may be embodied as various processing means such as one or more of a microprocessor or other processing element, a coprocessor, a controller or various other computing or processing devices including integrated circuits such as, for example, an ASIC (application specific integrated circuit), an FPGA (field programmable gate array), or the like. In an example embodiment, the processor **312** may be configured to execute instructions stored in the memory **314** or otherwise accessible to the processor **312**. As such, whether configured by hardware or by a combination of hardware and software, the processor **312** may represent an entity (e.g., physically embodied in circuitry—in the form of processing circuitry **310**) capable of performing operations according to embodiments of the present invention while configured accordingly. Thus, for example, when the processor **312** is embodied as an ASIC, FPGA or the like, the processor **312** may be specifically configured hardware for conducting the operations described herein.

Alternatively, as another example, when the processor **312** is embodied as an executor of software instructions, the instructions may specifically configure the processor **312** to perform the operations described herein.

[0055] In an example embodiment, the processor **312** (or the processing circuitry **310**) may be embodied as, include or otherwise control the operation of the TMM **275** based on inputs received by the processing circuitry **310** including information associated with the internal factors **340** and/or external factors **345**. External factors **345** may include, for example, data and information relevant to the airspace and environment within which an aircraft operates for the air segment including nearby airports at which a landing could be performed to transition to the ground segment. The external factors **345** may include traffic data over roads that form a part of the ground segment. In some cases, the external factors **345** may also include service capabilities for service providers at or on the way to the ground objective. For example, if the ground objective is a hospital due to an emergency of a medical nature, the external factors **345** may include parameters associated with ambulance vehicles, helicopters or other assets that can transport the patient from the aircraft **100** to a hospital. The parameters may include cost, speed, availability, equipment on board, etc. The external factors **345** may also include parameters associated with hospitals within range of the aircraft **100**. The parameters may include cost, space available, wait times for service, equipment on site (including status of equipment on site), experience or expertise of professionals on site or on duty, etc.

[0056] Within other contexts (i.e., for other subjects and situations that do not involve emergency medical situations), the external factors **345** may be correspondingly different as well. For example, in an emergent equipment failure or routine maintenance situation, the external factors **345** may again include similar factors to those above for the air segment. However, for the ground segment,

the external factors **345** may necessarily be different. For example, if the ground objective is a repair/maintenance facility for either emergent or routine repairs, the external factors **345** may include parameters associated with transporting the aircraft **100** or the component needing repair from the aircraft **100** to a repair/maintenance facility and/or parameters associated with the repair/maintenance facility itself. The parameters may include cost, speed of repair, availability of facility, availability of parts, speed of delivery of parts, repair equipment on site, repair capabilities (e.g., certifications/skills of mechanics), etc.

[0057] In either of the contexts listed above, the proximity of airports and the proximity of the ground objective to the airport selected are of key importance to balance in light of the other parameters. For example, if there are two hospitals or repair facilities with relatively equal cost and/or capability, then the decision on which airport to use may come down to which can ultimately be reached fastest. If one airport is closer (thereby enabling the aircraft **100** to quickly land and transfer to the ground segment quickly), but has a longer transit time (due to distance and/or traffic) to the ground objective than a more distant airport with a closer proximity (or faster path) to the ground objective, then it may actually make sense to stay in the air longer and fly to the more distant airport to shorten the overall travel time. In another example, the repair or wait time for service may actually cause the operator to select a longer transit time to the ground objective in order to shorten the overall wait time. For example, if a part is already on site at a more distant repair facility, the transit time to the more distant repair facility (although longer) may still be worth taking from a temporal cost perspective due to the fact that the repair work can begin immediately when the part (i.e., the subject) arrives at the ground objective.

[0058] Internal factors **340** may include, for example, driver, pilot or fleet manager objectives and preferences related to aircraft operations and/or ground vehicle operations. Additional internal factors include current and future aircraft weight, speed, configuration of landing gear and controls, and effects on performance of abnormal conditions such as failure of an engine or other aircraft system such as cabin environmental, hydraulics, electrical, communications systems, or other factor affecting otherwise normal flight operations for the air segment. Additional internal factors for the ground segment may include range, speed, payload, etc. for the ground vehicle **282**. In some cases, the communications capability or other equipment on board the ground vehicle **282** may also be internal factors.

[0059] Thus, for example, the external factors **345** may include airspace exclusions, architectures and procedures, winds and temperatures aloft, storms, icing, volcanic ash, turbulence, and other air traffic, including air traffic management flow control initiatives for congestion management for air segments. External factors **345** may include road closures, weather issues, traffic and other issues impacting transport to the ground objective for the ground segment. Internal factors **340** may further include pilot or operator policies and preferences for desired time of arrival, avoidance of turbulence or icing or other flight hazards, fuel burn minimization, and cost minimization, pilot skill level (e.g., based on flight hours, currency, and/or ratings) for the air segment, and may include preferences and operational characteristics of transporters (both people and equipment) for the ground segment.

[0060] As such, in some embodiments, the processor **312** (or the processing circuitry **310**) may be said to cause each of the operations described in connection with the TMM **275** (and/or the components or modules thereof) including operations in relation to processing the internal and/or external factors **340** and **345** to undertake the corresponding functionalities relating to providing continuous replanning of dynamically interacting trajectories to generate a guidance output (e.g., a pilot advisory recommendation regarding path optimization options for the air segment and a driving path recommendation regarding path optimization for the ground segment) responsive to execution of instructions or algorithms configuring the processor **312** (or processing circuitry **310**) accordingly. The TMCC **275** may also manage the provision of “proof points” associated with the trajectories calculated and any guidance output. Thus, it should be appreciated that for any given

subject and corresponding ground objective, the nature of the subject and the ground objective along with balancing all of the applicable parameters for both the air segment and the ground segment become a key component to providing guidance options along with context information and comparative data (i.e., proof points) to enable the operator(s) to make the best decisions for optimizing the most important parameters for a given situation.

[0061] In an exemplary embodiment, the memory **314** may include one or more non-transitory memory devices such as, for example, volatile and/or non-volatile memory that may be either fixed or removable. The memory **314** may be configured to store information, data, applications, instructions or the like for enabling the processing circuitry **310** to carry out various functions in accordance with exemplary embodiments of the present invention. For example, the memory **314** could be configured to buffer input data for processing by the processor **312**. Additionally, or alternatively, the memory **314** could be configured to store instructions for execution by the processor **312**. As yet another alternative, the memory **314** may include one or more databases that may store a variety of data sets responsive to input sensors and components. Among the contents of the memory **314**, applications and/or instructions may be stored for execution by the processor **312** in order to carry out the functionality associated with each respective application/instruction. In some cases, the applications may include instructions for providing inputs to control operation of the TMM **275** as described herein.

[0062] In an example embodiment, the memory **314** may store the internal factors **340** and may also store (temporarily or permanently) external factors **345** including dynamic parameters that are provided continually or periodically as updates. The processing circuitry **310** may be configured to process all materials received (e.g., at a mobile communication station (which should be appreciated to be capable of transmission and reception of signaling in connection with two-way communication)). The mobile communication station may be a wireless communication device onboard the aircraft **100** or ground vehicle **282**, or may be a wireless communication device of the aircraft **100** or ground vehicle **282** itself. The wireless communication device of the aircraft **100** or ground vehicle **282** may transfer information to and from passenger devices (with or without intermediate storage), or may transfer information to and from other aircraft or vehicle communications equipment (with or without intermediate storage).

[0063] The TMM **275** may be implemented in a system that comprises additional modules that may each include their own respective processing circuitry components, or that may operate under the control of the processing circuitry **310**. The modules of or in communication with the TMM **275** may include components that operate in connection with or as parts of the device interface **320** and/or the user interface **330**.

[0064] In an example embodiment, the TMM **275** may include or otherwise be in communication with a air segment path manager **350**. The air segment path manager **350** may be embodied as a computational engine for flight path (trajectory) management. An example of a suitable computational engine capable of continuous re-planning of five-dimensional trajectories, is disclosed in commonly assigned U.S. Pat. No. 8,594,917, entitled "Method And Apparatus For Dynamic Aircraft Trajectory Management" and U.S. Pat. No. 8,554,458, entitled "System and Method for Planning, Disruption Management, and Optimization of Networked, Scheduled or On-Demand Air Transport Fleet Trajectory Operations," the contents of each of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entireties. The air segment path manager **350** may include or otherwise be operably coupled to a proof points module **355** as described in greater detail below.

[0065] The TMM **275** may also include or otherwise be in communication with a ground segment path manager **352**. The ground segment path manager **352** may be embodied as a computational engine for ground transportation path management. In some cases, the ground segment path manager **352** may employ an existing navigation tool, application or module currently available on the market (e.g., Google maps, Waze, Apple maps, etc.). However, a proprietary or other navigation tool could be employed in some cases. Regardless of the specific tool used to provide functionality

of the ground segment path manager **35**, the ground segment path manager **352** may include or otherwise be operably coupled to the proof points module **355** as described in greater detail below. [0066] The proof points module **355** may be configured to perform path comparisons between different paths associated with an aircraft (e.g., aircraft **100**) and different paths associated with the ground vehicle **282** over the air segment and the ground segment respectively. The proof points module **355** is then also configured to generate comparative data and/or context information based on the comparisons for each respective segment. These comparisons may be across one or multiple parameters for each respective segment so that, for example, route optimizations can be determined on the basis of specific, selectable (by the pilot or other operators) parameters or combinations thereof. Thus, although the air segment path manager **350** can work with a plan manager **370** to define optimized routes generally for the air segment, the integration of the proof points module **355** can enable route optimization across multiple different selectable parameters and further enable balancing of the optimization efforts across parameters, while providing graphical evidence to the operator regarding the comparative benefits of the options being compared for the air segment. Similarly, although the ground segment path manager **350** works with the plan manager **370** to define optimized routes generally for the ground segment, the integration of the proof points module **355** can enable route optimization across multiple different selectable parameters and further enable balancing of the optimization efforts across parameters, while providing graphical evidence to the operator regarding the comparative benefits of the options being compared for the ground segment. As such, the proof points module **355** may be configured to determine and provide information regarding suggested or possible routes, and the comparative value of each route relative to a selected parameter associated with the external factors **345** and/or the internal factors **340** (e.g., time, fuel cost, carbon footprint, contrail generation, turbulence avoidance, traffic avoidance, service capabilities, etc.) to optimize arrival/delivery of the subject at/to the ground objective. In some cases, the proof points module **355** may be configured to plot a cumulative distribution function and/or plot probability based comparisons of one or more trajectories or paths for each of the air segment and the ground segment. Example embodiments may then further determine (e.g., via utilization of cumulative distribution functions or other probabilistic methods) a degree to which optimized routes are an improvement over other routes and present such information to a viewer (e.g., a pilot, driver, fleet manager or air traffic controller). Thus, example embodiments may provide proof points to demonstrate the comparative value of the solutions generated (e.g., by the air segment path manager **350** and/or by the ground segment path manager **352**) relative to other solutions and/or historical data. In some cases, data associated with flight paths or driving paths previously flown/driven and/or currently in flight or enroute may be utilized by the proof points module **355** to serve as a basis for generating the probabilistically based calculations associated routes being evaluated. As such, any given route can be understood in relation to a historical context of aircraft/vehicle performance models and actual data accumulated over time. In particular, data associated with a plurality of flights and routes flown previously and currently and/or routes or paths driven previously and currently may be utilized by the proof points module **355** to calculate (and graphically demonstrate through plan manager **370**) the cost improvements associated with an optimized route generated by the air segment path manager **350** and/or the ground segment path manager **352**. This methodology will be further described below in reference to FIGS. **4** and **5**.

[0067] The TMM **275** may also include or be in communication with a data communication manager **360**. The data communications manager **360** may be embodied as a data communications facility capable of integration with the computational engine of the air segment path manager **350** for flight path (trajectory) management and the ground segment path manager **352** for ground path management, while also managing real-time ATG, terrestrial or satellite network communications (or other communications to the aircraft **100** or ground vehicle **282**) that provide real-time data that relates to one or both of the internal and external factors **340** and **345**. As such, the data

communications manager **360** may be embodied as a communications device capable of accessing and ingesting the information required for the computations in fast-time (i.e., future time).

[0068] In an example embodiment, the TMM **275** may also include or be in communication with the plan manager **370**. The plan manager **370** may be embodied as a graphics engine configured to generate a graphical depiction of a flight guidance option **375** and/or a ground guidance option **377** in the form of a plan or option for the flight path and/or ground path, respectively (that may be provided to the user via the user interface **330**). The guidance option (or plan) may be provided in four dimensions (e.g., latitude, longitude, elevation, and time) to the pilot of the aircraft **100** for the air segment and in two dimensions for the ground segment to provide intuitive insights into advisory information provided by the TMM **275**, for pilot and/or driver decision-making.

[0069] In an example embodiment, the plan manager **370** may interface with the proof points module **355** to generate graphical and textual presentations of solution diagnostics and comparative benefits of various flight plan options and/or ground plan options to augment the flight guidance option **375** and the ground guidance option **377** with proof points data **380** from the proof points module **355**. The proof points data **380** may demonstrate comparative data and context information associated with a route being evaluated and another route (or historical collection of routes). Thus, for example, as shown in FIG. **4A**, a first flight path **400** may initially be calculated from a first point **410** to a second point **420** defining an air segment of a combined route that includes an air segment and a ground segment to reach a ground objective. Of note, the first point **410** and/or the second point **420** may be points of origin and destination, respectively. However, either or both could alternatively be waypoints of a larger flight path. Moreover, the first point **410** could be the current position of the aircraft **100**, or a future position from which action may thereafter be taken to adjust a flight path of the aircraft **100**. Additionally, it should be understood that the second point **420** may be an optional second point **420** that the user or operator may be equipped to select (or select an alternative second point) based on comparative data provided by the proof points module **355** for balancing options for the combined route. In other words, for example, the second point **420** may be selected as the best second point for enabling delivery of the subject to the ground objective for a particular situation.

[0070] FIG. **4A** also shows a second flight path **430**, which includes a first segment **432** and a second segment **434**. Each of the first flight path **400** and the second flight path **430** may be associated with data recorded for a number of previously flown trajectories either via actual data or modeled data that is generated based on actual data. Of note, there may be a plurality of other potential trajectories or routes between the first point **410** and the second point **420**. However, consideration of the first and second flight paths **400** and **430** between the first and second points **410** and **420** is discussed herein by way of example that may be applicable by extension to these other potential trajectories.

[0071] The proof points module **355** may be configured to compare the first flight path **400** to the second flight path **430** (and any other flight paths) in terms of any of time, fuel, distance, cost, contrail generation, carbon footprint and/or other parameters (e.g., cost parameters) of pilot and/or fleet manager/air traffic controller preference. The proof points module **355** may then be configured to generate the proof points data **380** described above. The proof points data **380** may include a parameter-specific path comparison (e.g., via the user interface **330**) to illustrate the comparison selected by the user. The proof points data **380** may also provide path diagnostic information in graphical or textual form to the pilot, explaining the rationale behind updated path advisories in a comparative way to demonstrate the degree of improvement relative to the selected parameter over other options (or another route being evaluated).

[0072] As discussed above, the TMM **275** may be configured to generate optimized solutions for the external factors **345** and the internal factors **340** that are provided including, at least in part, data that is received on or from the aircraft **100** via real-time wireless communications (e.g., via the ATG network **200**). The internal and external factors **340** and **345** may therefore include dynamic

and/or fixed parameters of various types, and the parameters may constrain the optimization of solutions. The dynamic parameters may include atmospheric parameters, airspace parameters, and aircraft parameters. At least some of these dynamic parameters may be communicated in real time (e.g., via the ATG network **200**) either to or from the aircraft **100** for use at the TMM **275** (regardless of where the TMM **275** is located). The TMM **275** may further augment the optimized solutions by providing comparative data (e.g., proof points data **380** indicating the cost improvement of a recommended route with respect to a particular parameter over another route or routes) for evaluation by the user. The TMM **275** may further provide context information (e.g., indicating impacts on other parameters) for the route so that the degree of impact across multiple parameters can be evaluated and balanced.

[0073] Some examples of atmospheric parameters that may constrain optimization solutions includes the following data for current and forecast conditions (among others that may be developed by weather information service providers in the future): [0074] Current Weather (Depictions, Freezing Levels, Precipitation, etc.) [0075] Winds Aloft (including Jet Stream, etc.) [0076] Surface Winds [0077] Temperatures Aloft [0078] Temperature-Dew Point data [0079] Visibilities (including runway visual ranges (RVRs), etc.) [0080] Ceiling [0081] Sky Coverage [0082] Radar Images (Composite and Tilt-specific, including gridded weather products) [0083] Satellite Cloud Cover [0084] Color Infrared (IR) Cloud Cover [0085] Echo Tops, etc. [0086] Volcanic Ash [0087] Adverse Weather Conditions (AIRMETs, SIGMETs, etc.) [0088] Thunderstorm and Severe Weather Forecast [0089] Uncrewed Aerial Systems (UAS) Operating Areas and activity [0090] Icing [0091] Turbulence [0092] Pilot Reports (PiReps, including electronic or ePiReps) [0093] Meteorological Terminal Aviation Routine (METAR) weather reports [0094] Terminal Aerodrome Forecasts (TAFs) [0095] Model Output Systems (MOS) forecasts and variants thereof [0096] Center Weather Advisories.

[0097] The National Airspace System (NAS) parameters (or simply, airspace parameters) that may constrain flight path optimization solutions include the following information for current and forecast traffic conditions: [0098] Temporary Flight Restrictions (TFRs) [0099] Special Use Airspace (MOAs, Restricted Areas, Firing Areas, etc.) [0100] Air Traffic Control Traffic Management Initiatives (TMIs) [0101] Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs) [0102] Airport Configuration Changes [0103] ATC Preferred Routing [0104] ATC Approved Routing [0105] Ground Delay Programs [0106] Time-Based Flow Management [0107] Airspace Flow Programs [0108] Ground Stops [0109] Coded Departure Routes [0110] And others.

[0111] The aircraft parameters required to be incorporated in the flight path optimization process include the following: [0112] Current and forecast aircraft weight (based on fuel and oil consumption measurement or modeling) [0113] Aircraft configuration (flaps and landing gear positions, for example) [0114] Aircraft Center of Gravity, current and forecast (for trim drag computation) [0115] Aircraft-based measurement of atmospheric conditions affecting aircraft performance calculations [0116] Pilot or dispatcher preferences and policies for each of the following flight path objectives: [0117] Minimum path length [0118] Minimum path time [0119] Required time of arrival [0120] Minimum path fuel [0121] Minimum path cost [0122] Tradeoff costs between path cost for engine reserves versus for fuel consumption [0123] Minimum path turbulence [0124] Minimum path icing [0125] Maximum allowable crosswind and tailwind for takeoff and landing [0126] Minimum runway length requirements [0127] Maximum fuel cost (for refueling stop optimization) [0128] And others [0129] Aircraft-based constraints on flight path options during the optimization process, including a complete digital representation of the current flight trajectory (for example as defined in the RTCA SC214 protocol or newer protocols to be developed for Trajectory-Based Operations (TBO) airspace.) [0130] And others.

[0131] Accordingly, for example, the TMM **275** may be configured to consider internal factors and external factors related to route optimization in light of at least some dynamic parameters that are communicated in real time to and/or from the aircraft **100** while in-flight (e.g., over a robust, low-

latency, high-bandwidth) wireless communication link with the aircraft **100** (e.g., via the ATG network **200**). Then the TMM **275** may provide comparative data and/or context information to demonstrate the value or degree of improvement of one route over another relative to one selectable parameter, or across multiple parameters. Thus, the TMM **275** considers deconfliction of multiple aircraft trajectories (e.g., via the air segment path manager **350**), but also receives real time dynamic updates (e.g., via the data communications manager **360**) to conditions that may affect the flight path of the aircraft **100**. Based on the dynamic parameters, the plan manager **370** may consider all factors that may impact flight path optimization (e.g., relative to internal factors set by the pilot or an operator, and external factors that may be dynamically changing) to output the flight guidance option **375** graphically. The proof points module **355** may then provide (again graphically) a visual comparison of the routes relative to specific selectable parameters to the pilot or operator (e.g., also with or as part of the guidance option **375**) with or without context information that further facilitates decision making by the pilot, air traffic controller or fleet manager.

[0132] FIG. **4A** shows a proof point data display box **440** that includes comparison data **450** and context information **460**. However, it should be appreciated that some embodiments could only provide one or the other of the comparison data **450** and context information **460** instead of both. The comparison data **450** of this example includes a visual and graphical comparison in the form of a graph that helps demonstrate the degree of improvement of one route relative to another. (i.e., comparing the first route **400** to the second route **430**). FIG. **5** shows a more detailed view of the comparison data **450** of FIG. **4A** in accordance with an example embodiment. In this regard, the comparison data **450** may include a first curve **500** showing a cumulative distribution function associated with the first route **400** and a second curve **510** showing a cumulative distribution function associated with the second route **430**. The cumulative distribution functions are plotted on a first axis **520**, which correlates to a user selectable parameter in this example, and a second axis **530**. The user selectable parameter may be, for example, fuel, time, cost, carbon emission, contrail generation, or various other cost parameters. The second axis **530** of this example may correlate to a percentage of number of modeled or actual flights for which data corresponding to the route associated with the respective curve is available. Thus, the comparison data may effectively define a plot of likely costs associated with a route in a probabilistic way. An area between the curves **540** may therefore represent a cost savings associated with selecting (in this example) the second route **430** instead of the first route **400**.

[0133] Referring again to FIG. **4A**, although the second route **430** appears to provide some fuel cost savings (presumably due to burning less fuel than the first route **400**), selection of the second route **430** may have other “costs” relative to other parameters. Thus, the context information **460** may be provided to give the user context for cross-parameter impacts of making a decision between routes. In this example it can be seen that the context information **460** informs the user that the new route (i.e., second route **430**) may, in addition to the fuel cost savings associated with selecting the second route **430**, impact some other parameters such as carbon output, time and turbulence encountered. In this example, the time cost will be higher, and the carbon output will also be higher. However, less turbulence can be expected on the second route **430**. Thus, the proof point data display box **440** can provide comparison data to compare the current route to another route to provide the ability to perform a value judgement on the basis of the particular parameter used in the comparison. However, the proof point data display box **440** can also (or alternatively) provide context information so that impacts on other parameters can also be appreciated such that, for example, if the improvement relative to one parameter is offset by additional costs to other parameters, the pilot can make an informed routing decision on multiple factors without cycling through multiple individual calculations and corresponding display generation cycles. All information can be appreciated from one display source.

[0134] It should also be appreciated that since the area between the curves **540** of FIG. **5** is

indicative of cost savings between two routes, the adoption of the better route can provide a better (i.e., less costly) route in terms of one or multiple parameters, and the cost can be quantified. In an example embodiment, the proof points module **355** may be further configured to generate a service charge based on the savings achieved by adoption of suggested routes. For example, the proof points module **355** may be configured to determine cost savings and apply a fixed percentage to the cost savings as the service charge.

[0135] Example embodiments may therefore be understood to integrate a real-time (or future time) trajectory manager with the data communication system that enables a flight path to be continuously (or periodically) optimized and updated, while also being augmented with comparative data and context information for air segments. As such, advisory information can be provided to the pilot, based on ever-changing current and forecast conditions for the atmosphere, the airspace and the aircraft **100**, from wherever the aircraft **100** is at each moment, to the destination, based on preferences and priorities set by the aircraft operator.

[0136] An example as applied to a ground segment is shown in FIG. **4B**. In this regard, in FIG. **4B** it is assumed that the second point **420** terminates the air segment and therefore begins the ground segment. Thus, the start point for the ground segment in FIG. **4B** is the second point **420**, and the ground objective **470** is displayed to indicate the end of the ground segment. It should be appreciated that the ground objective **470** may itself already be selected from a list of possible ground objectives. However, in some cases, dependent upon the subject and certain reasons or constraints for limiting eligibility for selection as the ground objective **470**, there may only be a single option for selection as the ground objective **470**. For example, in some cases, the ground objective **470** may be determined before the flight even departs, and the ground objective **470** may be the known or desired destination for delivery of the subject. Meanwhile, in other examples (such as emergent health or repair situations), the subject may be a person or piece of equipment that must get to a hospital or repair facility. While there could be a number of theoretical options (i.e., a number of hospitals or repair facilities) many of those options could effectively be disqualified based on lacking specific required or desired characteristics. For example, if it is the middle of the night, a facility that is open 24 hours may be required to be selectable as the ground objective **470**. Similarly, if the emergent situation is a traumatic injury, options for selection as the ground objective **470** may be limited to hospitals with an appropriate level of trauma center or emergency medicine capability.

[0137] In any case, FIG. **4B** assumes the ground objective **470** has been selected and shows a first route **472** and a second route **474** that may each be examples of ground guidance options **377**. Based on evaluation of the first route **472** and the second route **474**, the proof points module **355** may generate a proof point data display box **480** that includes comparison data **482** and context information **484**. The comparison data **482** may be similar to the more detailed information shown above for FIG. **5**.

[0138] FIG. **6** illustrates an example for which the ground objective is selected during the flight. Thus, for example, the ground objective may be assumed to be selected based on the occurrence of an event (e.g., an emergency event or a routine maintenance related event) that dictates that the subject be delivered to the ground objective. In this example, assume the event is a medical emergency and therefore the ground objective is a hospital that must have facilities capable of treating the medical emergency.

[0139] As shown in FIG. **6**, an aircraft **600** may be at a current location when the event occurs. At that point, the aircraft **600** may have the subject identified (i.e., a patient or piece of equipment needing urgent care or repair). In some cases, the subject may be indicated by providing an identification of the specific issue being faced to the TMM **275**. For example, the subject may be identified as a patient having suffered a stroke or as an engine having suffered a particular component failure). The TMM **275** may then determine, based on accessing databases of stored information relating to subjects and corresponding specific issues for the subjects, or via the

Internet, whether there are any hospitals or repair facilities within a given radius that can serve as the ground objective. The TMM 275 may employ rules for filtering options and the rules may be dependent upon the nature of the issue. For example, serious medical conditions or technical faults may require a minimization of total time taken to get to the hospital or repair facility. Less serious issues may enable more time to be taken, and other factors such as cost or progress toward the ultimate or original destination to weigh more heavily.

[0140] If we assume there are two hospitals or repair facilities that meet all of the rules for selection, then each may be a candidate ground objective (e.g., a first candidate ground objective **610** and a second candidate ground objective **620**). In this example there may be two distinct combined (or hybrid) routes that make up each of these respective candidate ground objectives and each of the distinct combined routes may include an air segment and a ground segment. For example, the first candidate ground objective **610** may be reached by a first air segment **630** and a first ground segment **632**, while the second candidate ground objective **620** may be reached by a second air segment **640** and a second ground segment **642**. A transition from the first air segment **630** to the first ground segment **632** may occur at a first transition point **650**, which may be an airport or landing strip. A transition from the second air segment **640** to the second ground segment **642** may occur at a second transition point **652**, which may be a different airport or landing strip. In this example, the first transition point **650** may be more distant than the second transition point **652** (relative to the current position of the aircraft **600**) meaning that the first air segment **630** is longer than the second air segment **640**. Meanwhile, as can be appreciated from FIG. 6, the first ground segment **632** appears to be shorter than the second ground segment **642**. The TMM 275 may evaluate these two potential routes and provide air segment proof points **660** and ground segment proof points **670**. The air segment proof points **660** may include air segment comparison data **662** and corresponding air segment context information **664**. The ground segment proof points **670** may include ground segment comparison data **672** and corresponding ground segment context information **674**.

[0141] Although only examples, the data in the air segment proof points **660** and ground segment proof points **670** of this example provide an instructive view into how one example embodiment may operate. In this regard, as can be appreciated from the air segment comparison data **662**, the second air segment **640** provides an improvement (i.e., savings) of time relative to the first air segment **630**. As shown by the air segment context information, the second air segment **640** also represents a shorter distance to travel to the second transition point **652** than would result from proceeding to the first transition point **650**. The estimated wait time for the patient at the corresponding second candidate ground objective **620** is 5 minutes. Thus, at least for getting to the second transition point **652**, the second air segment **640** appears to be the superior route. However, the ground segment proof points **670** indicate data regarding the ground segments that can be used to make a determination on balance considering both the air and ground segments.

[0142] In this regard, the ground segment comparison data **672** shows that the time savings for the first ground segment **632** is larger as compared to the second ground segment **642** than the savings shown by the second air segment **640** relative to the first air segment **630**. Thus, on balance and considering the combined (or hybrid) route, the first candidate ground objective **610** appears to be superior to the second candidate ground objective **620** in terms of the ability to arrive at the destination quicker. However, the ground segment context information **674** provides yet further information to confirm this decision. In this regard, the ground segment context information **674** confirms that the wait time to be seen at the first candidate ground objective **610** is also less than the wait time to be seen at the second candidate ground objective **620**. Thus, the patient can clearly be seen quicker at the first candidate ground objective **610** than at the second candidate ground objective **620**. The pilot may then select the first candidate ground objective **610** as the ground objective and proceed to land at the first transition point **650**. Thereafter progress may be tracked to the selected ground objective.

[0143] As the example above demonstrates, example embodiments enable a comparison of the most important (or at least the selected) parameter of interest, which is time for this example. However, the parameter of interest may be overridden as a determining factor if the context information suggests an otherwise counterintuitive choice from what is shown by the parameter of interest. For example, if the wait time at the first candidate ground objective **610** was two hours, then regardless of how quickly the subject could arrive at the first candidate ground objective **610**, the second candidate ground objective **620** would have been the better choice based on enabling the patient to be seen sooner due to the lower wait time.

[0144] It should be appreciated that the candidate ground objectives could alternatively be the same, but have different air and ground segments thereto in some examples. Moreover, other examples could provide comparisons for more than just two options, which is all that is shown here. Additionally, the ground and air segment proof points could be combined into a single graphical display or chart instead of in two separate charts or display windows, as shown in FIG. 6. Other changes are also possible without departing from the spirit of this example. For example, the concepts described above could also apply to routine delivery of people, parts or goods as well, and/or to the ordering of drop off points for such deliveries. In all cases, the provision of comparison data and context information may be significant tools for optimization of route selection in consideration of one or more parameters, and particularly when there is a situation in which more than one parameter is desirable for consideration.

[0145] The TMM **275**, interdependently supported by a high bi-directional bandwidth, low latency connectivity system, provides the first capability for pilots and drivers to gain access to advisory information on flight and ground path management and optimization in the context of continuously changing conditions, and user policies and preferences. The TMM **275** is generally founded on the concept of continuous re-planning of dynamically interacting flight paths (trajectories) and ground paths to provide pilot/driver advisories that, for the first time, enable trajectory selection to be made by pilots/drivers based on preferences, economics and safety with comparative data and context information that validates the value of the optimizations presented. The TMM **275** is configured to ingest data about observations and forecasts of atmospheric conditions, airspace status, and traffic, through data communications technology, to make the computations of future flight and ground paths that satisfy user preferences, trajectory economics, and safety that are accompanied with “proof” of the value added.

[0146] The capability described herein may be of significant value for improving safety and efficiency for current operations of commercial, business, general aviation and uncrewed aerial systems (UAS) aircraft operations worldwide. The capability may also be of significant value in future envisioned “Urban and Regional Air Mobility (URAM) electric eVTOL (Vertical Takeoff and Landing)” and “Thin Haul electric eCTOL (Conventional Takeoff and Landing” air taxi operating concepts, for enabling these high-density traffic systems to operate with safety and efficiency. The capability may also create advanced utility to the operations of Flight Operational Quality Assurance (FOQA) systems by providing a high-quality, high-fidelity baseline flight path for comparative analysis for pilot-flown paths.

[0147] In some embodiments, the TMM **275** may be disposed at the aircraft **100** and/or ground vehicle **282**. However, the TMM **275** may be disposed at the network controller **240**, any ground station, locations in the cloud, or any other location that may be in communication with the base stations and/or aircraft of the ATG network **200**. In some example embodiments, the TMM **275** may further be configured to operate in a mobile mesh network context. For example, the TMM **275** may be configured to utilize dynamic position information associated with multiple aircraft or vehicles in order to form mesh communication links between aircraft/vehicles. Thus, for example, one or multiple aircraft/vehicles (in a packet-based system) could relay information to another aircraft/vehicles from a terrestrial base station. In such an example, the dynamic parameters may be provided to and/or from multiple in-flight aircraft and/or enroute vehicles. In some embodiments,

multiple “hops” between aircraft/vehicles may be accomplished to reach remotely located aircraft/vehicle, or even to provide self-healing in a network where a particular ground station is not operating, but there are other aircraft/vehicles in the area that can relay information to fill in the coverage gaps left by the non-operating ground station.

[0148] The system of FIG. 2 may therefore include one or more TMMs 275 at one or more corresponding locations within the system. Regardless of the number and locations of such modules, the information associated therewith may be used to generate flight guidance options 375, ground guidance options 377 and/or proof point data 380 that can be provided, for example, to an operator, driver and/or a pilot at either end of a two-way communication link. Example embodiments may therefore provide highly capable, in-flight/enroute advisory services that consider dynamic parameters and the desires or business imperatives of a driver, pilot or operator. Proactive resource management, safety related advisory services, and other activities may then be undertaken to improve system performance and customer satisfaction.

[0149] As such, the system of FIG. 2 may provide an environment in which the trajectory management module of FIG. 3 may provide a mechanism via which a number of useful methods may be practiced. FIG. 7 illustrates a block diagram of one method that may be associated with the system of FIG. 2 and the modules of FIG. 3. From a technical perspective, the TMM 275 described above may be used to support some or all of the operations described in FIG. 7. As such, the platform described in FIG. 2 may be used to facilitate the implementation of several computer program and/or network communication-based interactions. As an example, FIG. 7 is a flowchart of a method and program product according to an example embodiment of the invention. It will be understood that each block of the flowchart, and combinations of blocks in the flowchart, may be implemented by various means, such as hardware, firmware, processor, circuitry and/or other device associated with execution of software including one or more computer program instructions. For example, one or more of the procedures described above may be embodied by computer program instructions. In this regard, the computer program instructions which embody the procedures described above may be stored by a memory device of a device (e.g., the TMM 275, and/or the like) and executed by a processor in the device. As will be appreciated, any such computer program instructions may be loaded onto a computer or other programmable apparatus (e.g., hardware) to produce a machine, such that the instructions which execute on the computer or other programmable apparatus create means for implementing the functions specified in the flowchart block(s). These computer program instructions may also be stored in a computer-readable memory that may direct a computer or other programmable apparatus to function in a particular manner, such that the instructions stored in the computer-readable memory produce an article of manufacture which implements the functions specified in the flowchart block(s). The computer program instructions may also be loaded onto a computer or other programmable apparatus to cause a series of operations to be performed on the computer or other programmable apparatus to produce a computer-implemented process such that the instructions which execute on the computer or other programmable apparatus implement the functions specified in the flowchart block(s).

[0150] Accordingly, blocks of the flowchart support combinations of means for performing the specified functions and combinations of operations for performing the specified functions. It will also be understood that one or more blocks of the flowchart, and combinations of blocks in the flowchart, can be implemented by special purpose hardware-based computer systems which perform the specified functions, or combinations of special purpose hardware and computer instructions.

[0151] In this regard, a method according to one embodiment of the invention, as shown in FIG. 7, may include receiving data indicative of internal factors and external factors related to route optimization for a combined route including an air segment and a ground segment to deliver a subject to a ground objective at operation 700. At least some of the external factors may include

dynamic parameters that are changeable while proceeding to the ground objective. The method may further include generating a guidance option associated with the combined route of the aircraft based on integration of the internal factors and the external factors to optimize the combined route for a user-selected cost parameter at operation **710**, and providing a graphical representation of the guidance option along with comparative data or context information associated with the user-selected cost parameter for each of the air segment and the ground segment at operation **720**.

[0152] In some cases, an advisory module capable of performing the method above may be provided. The module may include processing circuitry configured to receive data indicative of internal factors and external factors related to route optimization of a combined route of a subject. The combined route may include an air segment and a ground segment, and at least some of the external factors may include dynamic parameters that are changeable while the air segment or ground segment is being transited by the subject to a ground objective. The processing circuitry may be further configured to generate a guidance option to deliver the subject to the ground objective based on integration of the internal factors and the external factors to optimize a route to the ground objective, and provide a graphical representation of the guidance option along with comparative data or context information associated with the route.

[0153] The method described above in reference to FIG. 7 may include additional steps, modifications, augmentations and/or the like to achieve further objectives or enhance operation of the system. Similarly, the module described above may include additional features, modifications, augmentations and/or the like. The additional steps, features, modifications, augmentations and/or the like may be added in any combination with each other. For example, in some cases, the comparative data may include a graph showing a comparison of the guidance option with at least one other guidance option to demonstrate a value difference for a user-selected cost parameter between the guidance option and the at least one other guidance option. In an example embodiment, the graph may be a cumulative distribution function plotting the user-selected cost parameter against a percentage of a number of paths. In some cases, the internal factors may include driver, pilot or operator policies or preferences. In an example embodiment, the preferences may define a preferred time of arrival, preferred hazard avoidance strategy, preferred cost management strategy, and preferred fuel management strategy. In some cases, the user-selected cost parameter may include fuel consumption, time consumption, contrail generation, or carbon footprint. In an example embodiment, the context information comprises information indicative of an impact of following the guidance option on a cost parameter other than the user-selected cost parameter. In some cases, providing the graphical representation of the guidance option may further include both the comparative data and the context information associated with the user-selected cost parameter for each of the air segment and the ground segment. In an example embodiment, the subject may be identified during the air segment responsive to an event on an aircraft carrying the subject. In some cases, the subject may be a patient and the event is a medical emergency. In an example embodiment, the subject is a component of the aircraft and the event is a component fault. In some cases, the subject may be identified prior to commencement of the air segment. In an example embodiment, the ground objective may be changed during the air segment based on an event on an aircraft carrying the subject.

[0154] Many modifications and other embodiments of the inventions set forth herein will come to mind to one skilled in the art to which these inventions pertain having the benefit of the teachings presented in the foregoing descriptions and the associated drawings. Therefore, it is to be understood that the inventions are not to be limited to the specific embodiments disclosed and that modifications and other embodiments are intended to be included within the scope of the appended claims. Moreover, although the foregoing descriptions and the associated drawings describe exemplary embodiments in the context of certain exemplary combinations of elements and/or functions, it should be appreciated that different combinations of elements and/or functions may be provided by alternative embodiments without departing from the scope of the appended claims. In

this regard, for example, different combinations of elements and/or functions than those explicitly described above are also contemplated as may be set forth in some of the appended claims. In cases where advantages, benefits or solutions to problems are described herein, it should be appreciated that such advantages, benefits and/or solutions may be applicable to some example embodiments, but not necessarily all example embodiments. Thus, any advantages, benefits or solutions described herein should not be thought of as being critical, required or essential to all embodiments or to that which is claimed herein. Although specific terms are employed herein, they are used in a generic and descriptive sense only and not for purposes of limitation.

Claims

1. An advisory module comprising processing circuitry configured to: receive data indicative of internal factors and external factors related to route optimization of a combined route of a subject, the combined route including an air segment and a ground segment, wherein at least some of the external factors include dynamic parameters that are changeable while the air segment or ground segment is being transited by the subject to a ground objective; generate a guidance option to deliver the subject to the ground objective based on integration of the internal factors and the external factors to optimize a route to the ground objective; and provide a graphical representation of the guidance option along with comparative data and context information separately provided for both the air segment and the ground segment in adjacent display boxes.
2. The module of claim 1, wherein the comparative data comprises a graph showing a comparison of the guidance option with at least one other guidance option to demonstrate a value difference for a user-selected cost parameter between the guidance option and the at least one other guidance option.
3. The module of claim 2, wherein the graph is a cumulative distribution function plotting the user-selected cost parameter against a percentage of a number of paths.
4. The module of claim 1, wherein the internal factors include driver, pilot or operator policies or preferences.
5. The module of claim 4, wherein the preferences define a preferred time of arrival, preferred hazard avoidance strategy, preferred cost management strategy, and preferred fuel management strategy.
6. The module of claim 1, wherein the user-selected cost parameter comprises fuel consumption, time consumption, contrail generation, or carbon footprint.
7. The module of claim 1, wherein the context information comprises information indicative of an impact of following the guidance option on a cost parameter other than the user-selected cost parameter.
8. The module of claim 1, wherein providing the graphical representation of the guidance option further includes both the comparative data and the context information associated with the user-selected cost parameter for each of the air segment and the ground segment.
9. The module of claim 1, wherein the subject is identified during the air segment responsive to an event on an aircraft carrying the subject.
10. The module of claim 9, wherein the subject is a patient and the event is a medical emergency.
11. The module of claim 9, wherein the subject is a component of the aircraft and the event is a component fault.
12. The module of claim 1, wherein the subject is identified prior to commencement of the air segment.
13. The module of claim 12, wherein the ground objective is changed during the air segment based on an event on an aircraft carrying the subject.
14. A method comprising: receiving data indicative of internal factors and external factors related to route optimization for a combined route including an air segment and a ground segment to

deliver a subject to a ground objective, wherein at least some of the external factors include dynamic parameters that are changeable while proceeding to the ground objective; generating a guidance option associated with the combined route of the aircraft based on integration of the internal factors and the external factors to optimize the combined route for a user-selected cost parameter; and providing a graphical representation of the guidance option along with comparative data and context information associated with the user-selected cost parameter for each of the air segment and the ground segment in separate adjacent display boxes.

15. The method of claim 14, wherein the comparative data comprises a graph showing a comparison of the air segment and the ground segment of a first candidate for the combined route with at least one other candidate route to demonstrate a value difference for the user-selected cost parameter between the first candidate route and the at least one other candidate route.

16. The method of claim 14, wherein the graph is a cumulative distribution function plotting the user-selected cost parameter against a statistical percentage of a number of paths for both the air segment and the ground segment.

17. The method of claim 14, wherein the context information comprises information indicative of an impact of following the combined route on a cost parameter other than the user-selected cost parameter.

18. The method of claim 14, wherein providing the graphical representation of the guidance option further includes both the comparative data and the context information associated with the user-selected cost parameter.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein the subject is identified during the air segment responsive to an event on an aircraft carrying the subject.

20. The method of claim 18, wherein the subject is identified prior to commencement of the air segment.
