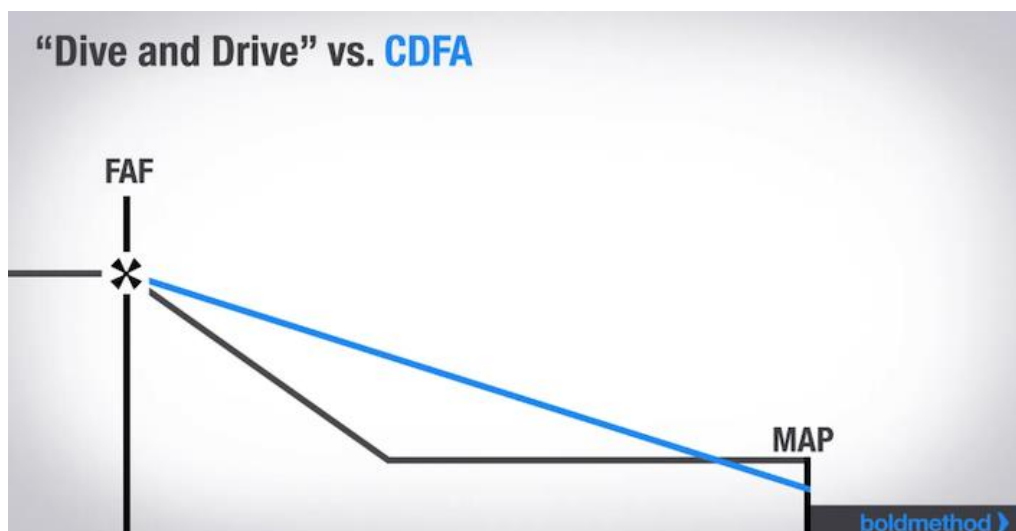


Continuous Descent Final Approach and SMS

Previous “Dive and Drive”, Now “CDFA”

In modern aircraft operations, various measures are implemented to prevent aviation accidents. Particularly during the phase from final approach to landing, high safety standards are required to prevent “Unstabilized Approach” and “CFIT: Controlled Flight into Terrain,” which are major accident factors. Achieving a stable approach and landing during this final approach phase is, needless to say, a critical requirement for airlines and pilots. This emphasis stems from the lessons learned from the numerous aircraft accidents that occurred, particularly during the 20th century.

Therefore, ICAO, along with the FAA and EASA, has recommended that countries transition from traditional approach methods—such as the “Step Down Descent” or “Dive and Drive” (step-down approach methods)—to the approach method known as “Continuous Descent Final Approach (CDFA)” (continuous descent approach method). In Japan, the issuance of the Flight Procedure Setting Standards in 2006 established the environment for implementing CDFA. As domestic Japanese airlines began operating aircraft using CDFA approaches, safety during final approaches has undoubtedly improved.



< The Difference in Trajectories Between “Dive and Drive” and “CDFA” >

Airlines that still operate “Dive and Drive”

However, at a certain conference held this fall, a pilot from one airline raised the question: “We do not implement CDFA, and I believe this is hindering the safe operation

of our aircraft. I would like to know about other companies' operational environments.” Following the hearing, it was revealed that all companies except the one that asked the question stated they implement CDFA. Upon hearing this, the pilot decided to more strongly advocate for the introduction of CDFA within their own company.

While this hearing involved pilots belonging to the Japan Federation for Aviation Safety (JFAS), similar cases may exist at other domestic airlines. Pilots at such companies should strongly advocate for implementing CDFA within their own organizations as an action to protect passengers' lives.

What is the role of aviation regulatory authorities?

ICAO Annex 19 “Safety Management” and ICAO Doc. 9859 “Safety Management Manual” clearly define the role of the aviation regulatory authority (Regulator). According to these documents, the Regulator manages whether an airline (Provider) is conducting its operations appropriately through audits and other means, performs its own risk assessments, and provides information as necessary. In other words, aviation regulators are required to continuously incorporate global aviation safety trends as knowledge, conduct their own risk assessments regarding Provider operations based on this information, and provide necessary advice when they determine that safety is compromised.

Aviation regulatory authorities in a position to advise on the introduction of CDFA

Considering Safety Management, domestic airlines must conduct internal risk assessments and evaluate the implementation of CDFA. Furthermore, aviation regulatory authorities, while conducting risk assessments of airlines through safety audits, are expected to play a role in promoting the adoption of CDFA, which is the global standard in aviation safety. However, the recent facts reveal that “neither party has conducted appropriate risk assessments.”

The fact that airlines in Japan still exist without implementing CDFA as of 2025 reveals the stark reality: “While the concept of Safety Management exists in Japan, it is not functioning properly.” ICAO states that aviation safety is achieved when “Regulators and Providers (in this case, airlines) each conduct risk assessments based on Safety Management, mutually utilize information, and continuously improve.” All aviation stakeholders in Japan must accurately understand that Safety Management is not functioning and strive for improvement.

JFAS: Raising Our Voices for Aviation Safety

Those working in aviation have been desperately striving to maintain safe operations, but the January 2024 Haneda incident reveals that this effort has already reached its limits. What Japan's aviation industry needs now is for all stakeholders, including the Civil Aviation Bureau, to change their mindset based on ICAO Safety Management principles. Regulators and providers must recognize that they are not in a “master-servant relationship,” but rather “good partners.”