Researchers looking to increase medium-haul aircraft efficiency favour an advanced turboprop over box-wing concepts.

In co-operation with Airbus, Hamburg University of Applied Sciences embarked on a study to explore a possible successor to the A320, as part of a project known as Airport 2030.

As well as an optimised conventional jet configuration, the study examines various box-wing designs, as well as the option of a turboprop. The team aims to consider high-efficiency aircraft designs which would avoid changing ground infrastructure.

The project involves studying families of single- and twin-aisle box-winged aircraft of 126-218 seats. However, while box-wing concepts offer a reduction in drag, this economic advantage is countered by the increased weight of the wing.

The direct operating costs of box-wing models are calculated to be some 20% higher than those of the A320.

However, the “smart turboprop” design’s economics prove more promising, the study says, with a 17% lower operating cost and a 36% cut in fuel burn.

This is based on a twin-engined aircraft with a high wing braced by struts, and a T-tail configuration featuring technologies including laminar flow.