

THE AIRPORT OPERATOR

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE AIRPORT OPERATORS ASSOCIATION

AOA URGES BUDGET SUPPORT FOR UK AVIATION

*and warns that the survival
of UK airports is at stake*



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KAREN DEE

Introduction to The Airport Operator



Welcome to this edition of The Airport Operator which tells the story of how UK airports are fighting to survive the worst crisis that they have ever seen, but also points to some optimism about the future.

We asked a diverse group of airports to tell us how this year like no other has been for them and they paint a vivid picture of the action they took to save their businesses and to start to prepare for the moment when we can all fly again. In this edition you can read the stories of chief executives at Bristol, Cornwall Airport Newquay, Doncaster Sheffield and Gibraltar.

As well as the view from airports, we also sought the perspectives of our airline colleagues, of the wider business community and of the regulator and you can read perceptive contributions in this issue from IATA, the CBI and the CAA.

Despite the tremendous difficulties that all airports are currently experiencing, it is also striking to see how many of them continue to press ahead with plans for growth and investment in the medium and long-term.

It was a cheering moment for our sector earlier this month when Leeds Bradford Airport won their local council's approval for a new terminal building. You can also read about how Stansted been making its case to a public inquiry to secure approval for an extra eight million passengers a year, while London Luton is seeking council approval for a one million increase in its annual passenger cap, Bristol Airport is appealing against a council decision to reject its plan for a two million increase in its cap and Southampton Airport seeks council approval for a vital runway extension.

All of these moves amount to a heartening vote of confidence from the owners of airports that we will recover and be a vibrant, successful sector again. But, while that is really good news for the future, it shouldn't distract us from the desperate situation that many airports find themselves in now after the Government has, in effect, forced them to close down their passenger operations.

The Office of National Statistics recently confirmed that air travel has suffered more from the pandemic than any other sector. The UK Government's statement that international travel restrictions will not ease before 17 May means that we will also be the worst-hit sector this year. It is against this grim background that we have called on the UK and devolved governments to set out sector-specific support to help ensure there are viable airports to be able to restart. In this issue you can read about the Airport Recovery Plan that we have submitted to Whitehall in our bid to secure urgent support. We will find out whether the Treasury has been listening on 3 March when Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, reveals his Budget.

I hope that Ministers and officials will also understand that it is not just financial support that we seek, vital as that is. Time and again in this crisis we have seen rapid and unexpected changes in Government policy for our sector announced with no warning or consultation.

Now we need a clear framework for recovery from Government that will enable us to plan ahead. Ministers can't just press a button and say now 'off you go'; we won't have the staff and airlines won't have the aircraft available. It is going to be a big logistical and operational challenge for all of us to be ready to maximise the benefits of a restart. My hope is that Ministers and officials will work with us to set out a clear pathway to reopening so that, when the time comes, we will all be ready to play our part in the nation's recovery. ■

Karen Dee, Chief Executive

AOA URGES BUDGET SUPPORT FOR UK AVIATION AND WARNS THAT THE SURVIVAL OF UK AIRPORTS IS AT STAKE

The Airport Operators Association has launched a 15-point Airport Recovery Plan in a bid to secure urgent support for UK aviation in Chancellor Rishi Sunak's 3 March Budget.

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26 May 2020

The report comes with a warning from AOA Chief Executive, Karen Dee, that “this summer must be a success for aviation if airports are to survive in the coming years”.

She said: “A further delay in airports’ recovery leaves the UK’s economic recovery at risk and the UK Government’s levelling-up and global Britain agenda in tatters. If government fails to step up to the plate, the impacts are clear: people and businesses who depend on aviation for their own success will carry the heaviest burden, particularly outside London and the South East of England”.

In the run-up to the Budget the AOA has been meeting MPs of all parties to outline its recovery plan. MPs on the Transport Select Committee have been fully briefed and copies of the report shared with Shadow spokespeople, airport and aviation-interested MPs and peers and similar groups in the devolved administrations.

The 17-page AOA report, published on 3 February and described as “A Recovery Plan to let UK airports take off again”, sets out how the Government can support airports through the aviation shutdown, help to restart aviation, boost the aviation recovery, ensure UK airports remain competitive and world-leading, ensure a sustainable aviation recovery and plan for future pandemic resilience.

Specifically, it says that the Government should:

1. Extend full business rates relief in 2020/21 and retain relief in 2021/22, while also providing alleviation from regulatory and policing costs in the current financial year and again in 2021/22.

2. Cover airport operating costs during closure of domestic and international passenger movements i.e., at least during the first quarter of 2021.

3. Put in place a testing framework



The impact of the pandemic on UK airports had been “unprecedented” and was felt across all airports, but significantly more so at smaller airports.

that sets out how and when testing will reduce and finally eliminate quarantine for international travel.

4. Withdraw business support only gradually, with a continuation of measures such as business rate relief and the Job Retention Scheme for the aviation industry.

5. Offer a 12-month Air Passenger Duty holiday, remove double-charging of domestic APD and deliver discounted APD for flights using sustainable fuels.

6. Reverse abolition of the airside VAT exemption and introduce arrivals duty-free.

7. Establish Public Service Obligation routes for important routes that are not returning and set up an Aviation Restart Fund to provide funding for airport charges on certain routes.

8. Reassert its commitment to “making best use of existing runways” and the safeguarding of land around airports.

9. Fund research for the trialling and implementation of current and future seamless journey technology

to facilitate a world-leading border experience.

10. Fund support for the further roll-out of next generation security equipment.

11. Allow Apprenticeship Levy funds to be spent on general skills training.

12. Fund the first stages of the Airspace Modernisation Strategy.

13. Establish a “Green Airports” Fund to fund sustainable power and heat generation, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, low emissions airside vehicle uptake and sustainable aviation fuel infrastructure.

14. Provide funds to improve access to airports, including green transport options.

15. Provide a framework for future pandemic management to be in place if and when COVID-19 is managed to a point where health restrictions are no longer required.

In her introduction to the report, the AOA Chief Executive said there was “a real prospect that 2021 is not

materially better than disastrous 2020”.

She pointed out that throughout the COVID-19 crisis airports had remained open in the national interest, serving remote communities and key industries such as oil, gas and offshore wind, as well as providing emergency services and bringing crucial supplies into the UK. All of these were costs borne by the aviation industry with little government support or recognition.

Dee said that government support would be vital, even in an optimistic scenario, to prevent the UK lagging behind our international competitors. UK-wide passenger numbers could return to 2019 levels around 2025 at the earliest, if 2021 sees a successful global vaccine roll-out and easing of travel restrictions, but that was genuinely an optimistic scenario.

She emphasised that “the role of government is to see the aviation sector not just through the immediate crisis but support the sector through the slow recovery with a UK-wide Aviation Recovery Package”. Dee said: “the financial damage of the pandemic for aviation will take years to repair, so the work must start urgently. This is particularly important outside London and the South East, where the recovery is expected to take longer to the detriment of the UK Government’s levelling-up agenda”.

The UK Airport Recovery Plan draws from a 56-page report commissioned by the AOA from the global business consultancy, Steer, on the impact of COVID-19 on the UK aviation sector. The Steer Report was completed in December 2020 and the consultancy has noted that developments since then “produce a significantly more pessimistic outlook for 2021 and a more adverse starting position for medium-term recovery”.

The Report notes that prior to the pandemic the UK was the fourth largest in the world and the largest in Europe, with 300 million passengers passing through UK airports. The

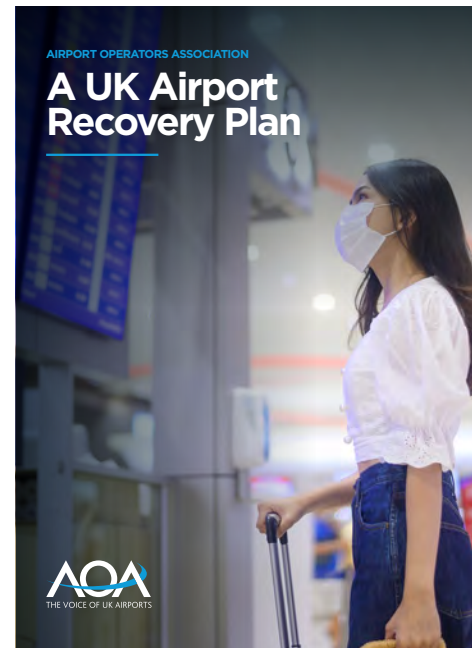
The Report develops three different traffic scenarios for the period 2021-25. All assume that UK domestic traffic recovery is stronger than international short-haul traffic due to fewer travel restrictions.

sector supported Gross Value Added of £46.2 billion, 832,000 jobs and associated income of £25.7 billion.

The impact of the pandemic on UK airports had been “unprecedented” and was felt across all airports, but significantly more so at smaller airports. All airports had sustained heavy losses but those sustained by small and medium-sized airports had been proportionately greater.

The Report develops three different traffic scenarios for the period 2021-25. All assume that UK domestic traffic recovery is stronger than international short-haul traffic due to fewer travel restrictions. They also all assume that short-haul traffic recovery is stronger than long-haul due to better cooperation on international traffic restrictions as well as more effective mitigation of the virus (e.g., through vaccines) within Europe, compared to many of the UK’s long-haul destinations.

Steer suggests that following the start of the projected traffic recovery in the spring of 2021, revenues are expected to pick up significantly across all airports. At large airports earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation (EBITDA) are projected to be positive from the summer



of 2021. At medium-sized airports EBITDA returns are also expected to be positive from the summer of 2021, though revenue recovery is slightly weaker and EBITDA returns might not be positive throughout the year in the most pessimistic scenario until 2025. At smaller airports annual EBITDA is expected to remain negative throughout the period.

Looking at prospects for airports by region in the 2021-25 period, the Steer Report suggests that the finances of London’s airports are projected to recover faster than those of other regions. This is partly because on long-haul routes airlines are likely to initially concentrate their capacity at Heathrow and Gatwick. In the North of England and Scotland the potential loss of connections to emerging markets in Asia and to hub airports in the Gulf could have significant negative implications for regional connectivity. The economic impact of lower traffic is likely to be felt the most in countries and regions more reliant on smaller airports, such as Wales, Northern Ireland and Yorkshire and Humberside.

Finally, the Report suggests that small and medium-sized airports will need to offer incentives and discounts on airport charges in order to attract traffic during the recovery. ■

AOA HEALTH AND SAFETY GROUP CO-CHAIR ENCOURAGES AIRPORTS TO “STEAL WITH PRIDE”

Heathrow’s Head of Health and Safety, Sharon Smith, who co-chairs the AOA’s Health and Safety Group, says that UK airports should do more to learn from each other about best practice in airport health and safety.

Along with co-chair, Joanne Johnstone, London Luton’s Head of Health, Safety and Environment, Smith has told colleagues at other airports that “it is OK to steal with pride. When people take the best of the best that is in the spirit of collaboration. It isn’t plagiarism and it is perfectly acceptable”.

Smith said that UK airports have a great track record in keeping runways safe, but that what she is seeking to do in the Health and Safety Group is “shine a light” on the health and safety of individuals in airport terminal buildings, whether they be passengers or staff. In particular, she has launched a work programme which will focus on steps that can be taken to improve employee injury rates. Drawing on her own experiences at Heathrow, she gave as an example “sharps

injuries” (where syringes or needles penetrate the skin) suffered by security staff searching passenger bags, with the number of such injuries now significantly reduced by the use of cut-resistant gloves.

The Group will use the AOA’s iAuditor safety benchmarking tool to review performance jointly, identify and address trends collaboratively and share best practice to target an airport-wide improvement in safety performance. It will monitor safety standards through 2021 to enable airports to move towards a performance targeted approach for 2022.

Smith said that airports had long been collecting statistics about time lost through injuries, but by harnessing the power of automation, the web-based tool would make it really easy for airports to gather and

UK airports have a great track record in keeping runways safe, but what she is seeking to do in the Health and Safety Group is “shine a light” on the health and safety of individuals in airport terminal buildings, whether they be passengers or staff.

“It brought us all together as we collectively tried to navigate a set of issues where we had no previous experience. It enabled us to come together and connect on a mutual subject that was impacting on absolutely everybody”.

share information about incidents resulting in injury. Airports would be able to provide the information anonymously, but they would know “where they are in the index and that can allow us to have a better and richer conversation”. It would make it possible to compare employee injury rates across all UK airports, regardless of size.

She emphasised that the point of benchmarking was “not to name and shame airports, but to say somebody is getting it right over here and that then allows us to say who is best in class and to learn from an airport what I can take from them. We can learn the conclusions from an incident and then collectively drive safety performance”. Smith said: “You can’t improve what you don’t measure, but if we start to measure our injury rates and we look at them, we can start to focus on reducing them”.

Smith said that she had been encouraging the spirit of collaboration within the Health and Safety Group since 2019, when she first proposed that holding meetings online would facilitate a more regular conversation. Then came the COVID-19 crisis, which had presented airport health and safety professionals with a multitude of new and unprecedented challenges, but also had the effect of reinvigorating the Group. Members

became keener than ever to learn from each other’s experiences and became quickly accustomed to doing so through video calls.

Recalling the early months of the crisis, she said: “It brought us all together as we collectively tried to navigate a set of issues where we had no previous experience. It enabled us to come together and connect on a mutual subject that was impacting on absolutely everybody”. Smith said that COVID-19 had necessitated a new emphasis on the health part of health and safety in relation to both physical and mental health. Looking ahead, she anticipates that “the next

pandemic is going to be a mental health crisis”

The Health and Safety Working Group now meets monthly with a key objective being to widen its membership. In addition to the regular group meetings, there will be two knowledge-best practice share sessions each year, each of which will be filmed, edited and widely distributed to AOA members. ■

For more information, please contact Sharon.Smith@heathrow.com



Sharon Smith, Heathrow's Head of Health and Safety

EXETER AIRPORT MP SAYS THE GOVERNMENT MUST ACT QUICKLY TO ENSURE THE SURVIVAL OF REGIONAL AVIATION

MPs receive hundreds of emails a day. Say a dozen or so will be from industry lobby groups in the UK economy. These emails often contain the latest bleak economic assessment of the severe damage the pandemic is doing to their respective sectors: “£X billion lost revenue”; “customers down Y% on a year before”; “indebtedness sky high”.

For some, it can be easy to gloss over aviation headline projections as a tad abstract. For MPs who don't have a commercial airport in their backyard, these figures could subconsciously feel remote: one day people will travel again to and from Spain, France, Italy or the US, so the thinking goes.

I know MPs with regional airports in their constituency feel a real responsibility to people whose jobs depend on aviation's long-term survival. I felt the devastating collapse of Flybe cruelly just before the furlough scheme came into place last year. Many local families overnight had no money coming in to pay the bills and put food on

the table. The airline was a lifeline for communities in the South West, served by its hard-working and dedicated staff.

A year on, the picture is brighter for my constituents. Exeter Airport was handed a real lifeline after I ran a successful campaign for airports to apply for up to £8m of financial support. In another boost for aviation in East Devon, the Dublin Aerospace Group has created 100 highly skilled aircraft maintenance jobs at Exeter Airport.

At the time of writing, however, only one flight took off today from the airport: a short internal flight to Belfast. Regional and City Airports, owners of Bournemouth, Coventry,

Exeter and Norwich airports, have lost 90% of passengers since the pandemic took hold. Despite this, these airports are still stepping up to the plate in playing a critical role in supporting our national effort to combat coronavirus, be it providing supplies for the NHS, army, and emergency services or ensuring mail continues to flow. These are Public Service Obligation (PSO) routes in all but name.

I'm acutely aware the commercial airline industry will need at least three months to get going again. Pilots may undergo flight simulator training or cabin crew will be brought onto updated contracts and shifts. That's why a go-date is absolutely crucial.

We cannot have an altogether avoidable “lost summer”. At the moment, opinion polling shows the British public widely want to keep the borders closed with tough custodial penalties for ignoring quarantine. When push comes to shove, however, is this really what should be in place in the summer when cases are fewer, the vaccine rollout continues at pace, and the idea of a break in Europe or further afield takes on a renewed appeal? It’s certainly up for debate and I know which side I’m on.

Last March, a review of Air Passenger Duty was announced as part of a package of measures to support regional connectivity by air. Many MPs welcomed this move to level the playing field to ensure regional airlines weren’t hampered by having to pay UK APD twice. The government should also look at extending the COVID Corporate Financing Facility (CCFF) repayment terms for airlines to bring this into closer line with loan repayment schedules for smaller businesses through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme.

We need clarity on the government’s position when the Aviation Recovery Plan and Regional Connectivity Review are eventually published. On the Transport Select Committee, we’ve considered the devastating impact of coronavirus on the aviation sector and the government’s response to support the sector and keep passengers flowing – not least travel corridors, passenger refunds, safe travel guidance, employee furlough, redundancies, and financing through the CCFF. But we still await one of the key tenets of this recovery through the Department for Transport’s plan, delayed as Ministers grapple with the ever-changing public health picture. It simply can’t come soon enough.

Even if we do hear good news on APD, the benefits of cutting it – an excise tax – will only be felt when planes can return to the skies and bookings come through as companies can choose whether to take the savings themselves or offer



*Simon Jupp,
MP for East Devon*

“We need clarity on the government’s position when the Aviation Recovery Plan and Regional Connectivity Review are eventually published”.

even cheaper fares. Either way, it’s essential the government uses all the tools at its disposal to ensure a fair playing field for operators such as Loganair, Blue Islands and Skybus that operate from Exeter Airport. And it’s equally essential that government support is not solely contingent on public confidence to fly, which is out of airlines’ control.

Post pandemic, the government needs to couple-up our levelling-up agenda with the role regional airports play in the wider UK connectivity. The South West is not all cream teas and sandcastles. Exeter Science Park is next to the airport and boasts tech businesses that export to Japan,

Exeter University and the Met Office are leading on cutting-edge climate change science research ahead of COP26, and farms across Devon package up their finest produce and sell into US and Asian markets.

The survival of regional aviation is critical. Without it, we’ll be levelling down rather than levelling up the economic growth we need now more than ever, in every corner of the country. ■

Simon Jupp is MP for East Devon and a member of the House of Commons Transport Select Committee.

SOUTHAMPTON AIRPORT TELLS LOCAL COUNCIL ITS FUTURE DEPENDS ON A RUNWAY EXTENSION

Southampton Airport has told Eastleigh Borough Council that approval of its plans for a runway extension “is now fundamental to the future of the airport”.

The statement is part of new information submitted to the Council last month in support of its planning application for a 164-metre runway extension.

The airport told the council that, as a result of COVID-19, there is now only a very low level of activity at the airport, with one or two flights per day to the Channel Islands and a large number of staff being furloughed.

“Despite this significant fall in both use and income which, coupled with the collapse of Flybe, could have catastrophic long-term implications for Southampton Airport” the airport’s submission says that: “the parent company, AGS Airports Limited, remains committed to the capital investment required for the

runway extension. The extension is now fundamental to the future of the airport, to ensure long-term resilience is captured for when the current pandemic situation begins to ease for the aviation sector. Southampton Airport being able to offer a wider variety of routes from a higher number of different operators, will ensure that the airport can remain a key part of the local and sub-regional economy”.

In its additional and revised information, Southampton Airport says it is “unlikely to operate at a level more than approximately 50% of the level of operations before the collapse of Flybe without the runway extension in the foreseeable future”. At the level of operations forecast without the extension the

airport “would be loss-making”. By contrast, approval of the

Southampton Airport being able to offer a wider variety of routes from a higher number of different operators, will ensure that the airport can remain a key part of the local and sub-regional economy.



application would allow the airport to engage with a wider variety of airline operators as they seek to introduce alternative routes to replace those of Flybe.

More airlines and new routes would “help to secure the viability of the airport, safeguard jobs in the local area that would otherwise be lost and provide future resilience through a lower level of reliance on a single operator”. The airport said this should be “a key material consideration” in Eastleigh Borough Council’s determination of the planning application.

The airport has explained to the Council that the current runway length prevents many airlines operating their fleet from the site. The former Flybe fleet of 63 aircraft was the single largest fleet capable of using the airport and, following its collapse, there are now only just over 100 aircraft in the UK market that could be accommodated in the summer season without the extension.

However, the airport says that “the runway extension would enable a further 900+ of the aircraft operating within this market, mainly from the Airbus A320 and Boeing 737 families and comprising the preferred fleets of market-leaders Ryanair, EasyJet, Wizz Air and Jet2, to operate from the site”.

A public consultation on the airport’s proposals is now underway and a final decision on the planning application will be taken by the Eastleigh Local Area Committee of Eastleigh Borough Council, possibly next month. ■



“The runway extension would enable a further 900+ of the aircraft operating within this market, mainly from the Airbus A320 and Boeing 737 families and comprising the preferred fleets of market-leaders Ryanair, EasyJet, Wizz Air and Jet2, to operate from the site”.

IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL - WHY IT'S SO IMPORTANT TO BUSINESS THAT THE AVIATION SECTOR SURVIVES AND THEN THRIVES

By Matthew Fell, CBI Chief UK Policy Director.

At the CBI, we're clear that the aviation sector matters for the UK economy. We've been a leading voice in support of aviation from the moment the pandemic struck.

Our role in speaking for businesses of all sizes and sectors, across the breadth of the UK, make us a powerful ally.

It means we can speak with authenticity about aviation's importance to the wider economy, whether that be through boosting tourism, meeting clients overseas, enabling engineers to support manufacturing in foreign markets or bringing goods into the UK.

Our presence in all regions and nations of the UK means we

understand how critical aviation is to tackling regional inequalities, with its supply chains running deep into local economies.

And with our membership spanning airlines and airports, as well as the supporting logistics and infrastructure firms, we can be clear about the importance of the sector in its own right, as a source of skilled jobs right across the UK.

For all these reasons, we've strained every sinew and worked collaboratively with the government to shape the Job Retention Scheme, put in place business loan schemes and argue for grants to help maintain jobs and save firms in these challenging times.

But the Covid virus is proving hard

to beat. So, how can we help the aviation sector survive and then thrive? It feels to us that we need to approach the challenge with bi-focal lenses.

First, comes the short-term action.

We're calling on the Chancellor to take urgent action to support jobs, by extending the furlough scheme, and to support cashflow with further action on business rates and VAT.

We want assurances from the Treasury that it will provide support commensurate with the impact of restrictions. Increasingly, this support should be focused on the parts of the economy in most distress, including in supply chains and hardest hit sectors, something



*Matthew Fell, Chief UK
Policy Director, Confederation
of British Industry*

that the aviation sector can legitimately claim has not been the case so far.

And we want the government to set out a clear recovery plan, to help put an end to the stop-start nature of restrictions and enable business to plan for a successful return to growth. For the international travel sector, this would include a clear set of criteria for re-opening, and a plan for making maximum use of testing and vaccines to get people back flying as soon as it is safe to do so.

At the same time as these actions for survival, it's important to think about Britain's place in the world and how we equip ourselves for long-term success.

The UK has a once in a generation opportunity to shape its future. The twin shocks of Covid and Brexit coupled with structural changes driven by Net Zero and technology offer a chance to shake off persistent challenges around productivity, regional and social inequality.

Unprecedented times call for an unprecedented response. This is an opportunity for Britain to do something different and better than it's ever done before, to set out a vision for how we compete in the world. And it can be done in a unifying way, with business and government collaborating on a shared mission.

The vision must be bold. It should put

“We want the government to set out a clear recovery plan, to help put an end to the stop-start nature of restrictions and enable business to plan for a successful return to growth”.

some stakes in the ground and point towards the sort of economy we want to be in a global context.

The aviation sector should and must be at the heart of this vision.

First, by deploying the skills, innovation and technology inherent in the sector to secure a low carbon future through the development of sustainable aviation fuels and the broader “Jet Zero” ambitions.

Second, by helping to tackle regional inequalities and making build back better a reality. From professional services firms in London through to manufacturers in the North East, aviation has a critical role to play in ‘levelling up’ the UK, a view we’ve made loud and clear in the Regional Air Connectivity Review.

And third, the aviation sector must play a central role in “Global Britain”. We have a unique opportunity to re-establish the UK on the world stage this year, as hosts to both the G7 and COP26. More than anyone, airlines provide the connectivity and access to markets around the world, the lifeblood of any successful modern economy.

That’s why the CBI, as the voice of business, is standing shoulder to shoulder with the aviation sector to help it survive and then thrive. ■

Matthew Fell is Chief UK Policy Director of the Confederation of British Industry.



PLANS FOR A NEW £150M TERMINAL AT LEEDS BRADFORD AIRPORT APPROVED IN PRINCIPLE

Leeds Bradford Airport is celebrating council approval for a completely new terminal building that will replace the existing terminal built in 1965.

After a marathon debate of more than eight hours, nine members of Leeds City Council's city plans panel voted to back the plans in principle, while five members voted against.

Now the airport will make some minor changes to its plans to take account of concerns raised during the debate and then resubmit them for full permission by the panel later this year. They are then expected to win final approval from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Airport Chairman, Andy Clarke, said that because the approval process had been delayed by COVID-19 a completion date of 2023 was now unlikely. He promised that the new building would be the most environmentally friendly terminal in the UK. Clarke said the airport was "delighted" to have secured the panel's in principle support, adding: "If fully approved, our scheme would enable us to become a net zero airport, delivering a much-improved passenger experience and creating thousands of jobs, helping to support our region's recovery".

Charles Johnson, Head of Planning and Development at the airport said that he and his team would now work with planning officers to establish what the conditions for full approval would be. Noting some of the concerns raised by

The 34,000 sq.mt. state-of-the-art building will be constructed to an environmental standard that, the airport says, only a handful of other airport terminal buildings in the world have achieved.

"If fully approved, our scheme would enable us to become a net zero airport, delivering a much-improved passenger experience and creating thousands of jobs, helping to support our region's recovery".

panel members during the debate, he said: "They had a few issues around the train station, around taxis and on landscaping". Johnson said the new terminal would "provide the people of Yorkshire and of the region with a world class terminal", adding that it had also been designed with a clear focus on people with restricted mobility.

The decision by councillors has been welcomed by business organisations in the region who want a more modern airport with a greater range of destinations. Clarke said the airport had been in discussion with a number of airlines over the last year and, while it was too early to make any announcements about additional routes and airlines, "we have got some exciting opportunities that will give broader

routes for business travellers, as well as for the holiday traffic".

Clarke said that some passengers would always go to a bigger airport, like Manchester, but "where there are opportunities for those passengers not to have to travel so far, flying from a modern airport to the destinations that they choose, that is going to be a step change for the experience of those passengers and of course will be good for the environment".

The 34,000 sq.mt. state-of-the-art building will be constructed to an environmental standard that, the airport says, only a handful of other airport terminal buildings in the world have achieved. The airport has estimated that the development will support over 12,000 permanent jobs across the Leeds City Region and create 850 construction-related jobs over the period of building work. ■

*Andy Clarke, Chairman
Leeds Bradford Airport*





FACING THE CHALLENGE AND FUTURE TOGETHER

By CAA CEO, Richard Moriarty.

Twelve months ago, few of us could have predicted our current situation. The coronavirus pandemic has taken an enormous human and economic toll, and sadly will continue to do so for the foreseeable future, despite the planned global roll-out of vaccines. Aviation has suffered unprecedented financial harm and we have seen many valued colleagues and friends lose their roles across the industry as businesses make the very difficult but necessary decisions needed to survive. Not only has aviation already had to endure a whole year with a huge loss of demand and hence income, it also faces an uncertain next few months ahead of what for many is a critical summer season.

You do not need me to tell you just how challenging the last 12 months have been for the airport sector in particular. In 2019 UK airports handled a combined total of 296m passengers - if 2020 had been a normal year, we would almost certainly have broken through the 300m passenger milestone. As it is, the figure was closer to 60m, almost an 80 per cent decrease. This statistic represents an immense existential struggle for businesses trying to survive a severe a prolonged downturn, especially

“I would like to publicly recognise and applaud the professionalism and dedication of all colleagues in aviation, who under very difficult circumstances have ensured airports have continued operating throughout the last 12 months”.

for infrastructure operators where significant cost items are fixed. The uncertainty over when normal service can resume, and the inability to plan ahead, is only adding to the pain.

I would like to publicly recognise and applaud the professionalism and dedication of all colleagues in aviation, who under very difficult circumstances have ensured airports have continued operating throughout the last 12 months. Very difficult decisions have had to be made to balance the need to keep operating against the necessity to reduce costs.

Despite the enormous financial and management challenges, I believe that airport operations have coped with the ongoing challenges and uncertainty remarkably well. The sector has helped with the national effort in terms of guaranteeing vital medical supplies and equipment is flown into and around the country. Airports have also found themselves in the media and political spotlight for much of the response to the pandemic. Air corridors, passenger testing and quarantine measures are all issues that airports have very little direct control over but are nevertheless closely involved in.

I appreciate that everyone wants to have confidence that a recovery scenario is in prospect soon. When the time comes for travel to restart, I believe UK aviation will play a critical role in our economic recovery. Aviation will literally get us moving again, connecting us to our trading partners and driving economic growth as it moves passengers and cargo around the world. All of our research and intelligence suggests there is tremendous pent up demand for people wanting to holiday, visit friends and relatives and conduct trade and business.

As the regulator for the UK aviation



*Richard Moriarty, Chief
Executive Officer, Civil
Aviation Authority*

“I want to reassure everyone within the industry that we will continue strong and productive working relationships with our European partners”.

the businesses we regulate over the recent transition out of the European system. Looking forward, we will be working closely with the Government to identify potential areas where reform of the current status quo can deliver real benefits, without compromising safety, security and consumer interests. In many cases, like for commercial aviation, there will be benefits to the industry in remaining aligned with the existing international framework. In other areas, such as grassroots sport and recreational aviation and new and future technologies, there may be opportunities for regulatory reform which will deliver greater benefits.

I want to reassure everyone within the industry that we will continue strong and productive working relationships with our European partners. We will do all we can to preserve the close ties that bind the UK and EU aviation sectors. Further afield we have already started deepening our international relationships by establishing mutual recognition arrangements with our equivalent authorities in the US, Canada, Brazil, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and Singapore.

Whatever the ‘new normal’ looks like when we are on the other side of the pandemic, we will all be affected by this experience for many years to come. Hopefully, though, we will be able to build on what we have learnt and look forward to the future with confidence. Whatever lies ahead, facing it together will give us all the best possible outcome. ■

Richard Moriarty is Chief Executive Officer of the Civil Aviation Authority.

industry, we are totally focused on doing all we can to assist airport businesses weather the current storm and aid their operational recovery efforts in a safe and consumer-focused way. We have had many conversations with airports all over the country, working with them on how to reconfigure their operations in a safe and secure manner.

Another task for us all will be working to make sure we have a safe return to normal. Much of the industry, from aircraft to systems and individuals, will have been either dormant or working at reduced capacity. As

demand increases, potentially with a surge from a low baseline, the re-start will pose some safety challenges that we all need to be aware of and have plans in place to mitigate.

The UK and the CAA now has more flexibility than before when it comes to setting regulations. We are no longer a member of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). This has necessitated a huge amount of work on our part to re-establish ourselves as an independent regulator, and to provide continuity and assurance for

G7 SUMMIT IN JUNE WILL GIVE CORNWALL AND ITS AIRPORT A “ONCE IN A LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY”

Plans to hold a world leaders' summit in Carbis Bay, Cornwall, this summer present “a once in a lifetime opportunity to put Cornwall on the map”, according to Pete Downes, Managing Director of Cornwall Airport Newquay.

Downes says that when he talks about the long-term recovery of the airport from the collapse of Flybe and the COVID-19 crisis, he sees “the legacy of the G7 as being the single most important gift and the single most important tool that we will have at our disposal to drive the recovery, as after the G7 everyone will know Carbis Bay, will know St Ives and will know Cornwall”.

The G7 summit, scheduled for 11 to 13 June, virus permitting, will be the first such meeting for two years. It will be hosted by Boris Johnson and attended by US President, Jo Biden, and the leaders of Canada, France, Italy, Germany and Japan, as well as the European Union and invited leaders from Australia, India

and South Korea. Cornwall Airport Newquay is an official partner of the event and will see leaders' planes arriving from around the world, though it is not yet known whether Jo Biden will fly in directly from the US on Air Force One.

But Downes says: “What really excites us as much as the actual three days of the summit and the role we play there is what this does for Cornwall in terms of long-term legacy and how visible Cornwall will be around the world when this summit is being held. The real opportunity for the airport doesn't come from having a few planes on site in June, it comes from those images of Carbis Bay and St Ives being seen around the world and what that will do for people's awareness of the charms





and enduring appeal of Cornwall”.

He said: “I think it will give us a platform as we look to grow our international routes over the coming years and start to increase the number of markets where a direct link to Cornwall will be seen as something with potential”. There would also be a huge opportunity for international connections via the airport’s link to London. The G7 being in Cornwall was “a once in a lifetime opportunity to put Cornwall on the map and gives us a fantastic tool to go out and market Cornwall to airlines and tour operators and grow the number of services going forward”.

Meanwhile, a decision is imminent on which airline will be awarded Cornwall Airport Newquay’s Public Service Obligation (PSO) route to London for the next four years. The service, which is widely expected to be to Heathrow, will provide Newquay with year-round connectivity to London, which Downes said was ultimately what the PSO was there to deliver. Its renewal was always an important point for the airport, he said, but it was even more important this year because “it will really light the way ahead for the airport’s recovery and will form the basis on which we can build”.

A recovery is badly needed at

Cornwall Airport Newquay, which has seen its passenger numbers plummet from 461,00 in 2019 to just 68,000 in 2020. Most of the 2020 volume was in the first two months of last year before the collapse of Flybe and the onset of COVID-19. Until 2019 Flybe accounted for 70% of the airport’s passenger traffic.

While the airport terminal has been closed to passenger traffic throughout the lockdowns, the aerodrome itself has remained open for training, General Aviation, coastguard, search and rescue and military flights. The airport’s in-house radar and air traffic control services have also continued to keep the skies of Cornwall safe for small airfields in the county and for the lifeline services between Land’s End and the Isles of Scilly, with Cornwall Airport Newquay being available for any bad weather diversions.

Downes comments: “That applies in the skies all over Cornwall. If an

aircraft has a problem in the air, we have been, throughout the pandemic, the people who will support and deal with that problem in the air, get that aircraft on the ground and then have the support on the ground in terms of rescue and fire-fighting services to deal with any issue. We have been doing that very much at cost and at a significant financial loss for the benefit of the wider industry. I think that is lost sometimes, just how much regional airports in far-flung corners of the country actually do to keep the rest of the industry moving”.

Like other small regional airports, most of Cornwall Airport Newquay’s revenue in normal times comes from passenger flights. With most of those having been effectively shut down by Government fiat, Downes believes that the Government should now step in to help smaller regional airports. Looking ahead to the Chancellor’s Budget on 3 May, he hopes that the Treasury will eliminate the charging of Air Passenger Duty

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*Pete Downes, Managing
Director of Cornwall
Airport Newquay.*

(APD) on one leg of a domestic journey. There are, he says, “so many benefits that can be derived and the recovery of airports like ours can be so well-supported by the simple change of a 50% reduction in APD. It would quite genuinely be transformational for many of those smaller and further-flung UK regional airports”.

Domestic traffic has historically accounted for over 75% of Cornwall Airport Newquay’s passenger numbers, with particularly strong domestic leisure traffic through the summer season. If, as most observers expect, domestic leisure traffic is

the first aviation sector to bounce back, that would significantly boost the airport’s short-term recovery prospects. As Downes puts it, “if what you need as an airline is more domestic traffic and a strong leisure focus, there is nowhere in the UK that is better placed to deliver domestic leisure traffic than Cornwall and we have certainly seen a quite unprecedented level of interest in getting Newquay flights”.

If “staycations” are permitted this summer, while foreign holidays remain impossible, the airport’s passenger numbers could rebound strongly, though Downes cautions that he has learnt to take nothing

for granted. Another point that Downes is keen to emphasise is that, with the airport’s workforce now down to less than half of normal summer season levels, it will take time for it to rebuild. He said: “We just wouldn’t be in a position where we could get back to half a million passengers a year, even if the demand was there, because the business needs to recover, as well as the traffic base”.

During the lockdowns, Downes’ priority has been to maintain regular dialogue with the airport’s existing airline partners, not least Loganair, who stepped in just before the pandemic with commitments to take over some of the main Flybe routes. All being well, Loganair hopes to begin operations this spring reconnecting Cornwall to Edinburgh, Newcastle and Aberdeen, as well as operating routes to Teesside, alongside the current Eastern Airways service, and to Manchester.

Downes stresses the importance of rebuilding year-round capacity to Manchester, which had been delivering 100,000 passengers up to 2019 and he was clearly delighted when easyJet announced Newquay as a new network point earlier this month. EasyJet will offer a year-round five times a week service to Manchester and a twice a week summer season service to Glasgow.

Following these new airline and route announcements, Downes concludes that: “If travel can get going again, I think we will be ahead of the game in a number of markets because we have got these new airlines in and services on sale. In these really difficult times of the terminal being closed and staff being furloughed, that has been a massive morale-booster for everyone connected to the airport. It gives people hope that when the time comes they will be able to get back to work and there will be a secure long-term future for them at the airport”. ■

*Dave Lees,
CEO Bristol Airport*



BRISTOL AIRPORT LAUNCHES FIGHT TO OVERTURN COUNCIL VOTE AGAINST EXPANSION PLANS

Bristol Airport has launched its appeal against a decision by North Somerset Council to reject its expansion plans which would allow passenger numbers to grow from 10 million to 12 million a year.

The council's planning officers had recommended that planning permission should be granted, but a year ago councillors refused permission by 18 votes to seven, citing the impact of the plans on the environment and neighbouring communities.

Supporters and opponents of the airport's plans, which include extensions to the terminal building, including a new immigration hall, and construction of a new multi-storey car park, had until 22 February to submit their comments. A public inquiry on the airport's appeal, led by an independent planning inspector, is due to start in mid-July and is expected to last four weeks. The council has said it will mount a "robust defence" of the decision to refuse planning permission. The inquiry will conclude either with a decision by the inspector or a recommendation to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

The airport's appeal comes as passenger numbers at Bristol have been reduced to a trickle by the COVID-19 crisis, but airport CEO, Dave Lees, said he is confident that passenger numbers will regrow again after the crisis and that expansion will both create jobs and boost economic development in the West of England.

He said that opponents of the expansion plan, concerned about carbon emissions, should consider what would happen if the appeal was rejected. People would still travel by air but, instead of being able to use their local airport, many of them would drive to one of the London airports. "That is not good news, is it?" he suggested; "it might look like you have achieved a win in terms of not allowing Bristol to grow, but the issue of carbon won't go away, so you are just putting your heads in the sand".

Lees is also keen to emphasise that sustainability and greener growth are at the heart of Bristol Airport's plans and that it has proposed a comprehensive package of

measures to minimise the adverse environmental effects of an additional two million passengers per year.

He points to improvements that the airport has already made and is planning to make in terms of its own performance on carbon emissions, which have fallen by 15% over the last four years. Part of that was due to the investment that the airport has made in on-site generation of solar electricity, which by 2025 will account for a quarter of the airport's electricity consumption. Since last year the airport has also been offsetting all journeys to the airport made by car, delivering what it believes is a European-first for airports. Bristol Airport plans to become carbon neutral for direct emissions by 2025 and a net zero airport by 2050.

Focussing on the economic benefits of allowing the appeal, Lees said the expansion would make an important contribution to the Government's "levelling-up" agenda in the South West – delivering up to 5,000 new jobs in the region through supply chain growth and increasing inbound tourism. There would be 700 new jobs at the airport itself and Lees said that a skills and employment plan tied to the development of the airport would enable work experience, apprenticeships and job-readiness support. The plan would ensure that a good proportion of the new jobs would go to people from deprived areas such as south Bristol.

When its expansion plans were first submitted the airport expected that there could be twelve million passengers using it by 2026. Now the airport's central assumption is that it will reach twelve million annual passengers by 2030. While there is uncertainty over the precise timing, Lees says he is in no doubt that recovery will come "and when it comes it will be a strong recovery". He pointed to a recent survey of 7,000 people that the airport had conducted, where 80% of respondents said that they wanted to fly within the next twelve months.

The expansion would make an important contribution to the Government's "levelling-up" agenda in the South West – delivering up to 5,000 new jobs in the region through supply chain growth and increasing inbound tourism.

Looking back over what he described as the "snakes and ladders" of the last year, Lees said that the most important challenges that COVID-19 had presented to the business related to its people. Just over 30% of the staff had been made redundant and, of those that remain, 60% are on furlough, while many of those still working are not on-site. The biggest challenge had been "keeping people optimistic that we can come through this, albeit as a smaller team initially".

Asked what he thought were the most important steps that the Government could now take to support the recovery of airports and of aviation in general, he mentions three:

Firstly, he said, the Government has a key role to play in rebuilding trust in aviation, by communicating clearly about what the recovery would look like. He said that the UK should be working with other countries to agree on rules for testing and health passports. Most people had spent the last twelve months either at home or close to home and for many travelling abroad would feel "exciting, but strange". They would need clarity and certainty, which the Government should be providing.

Secondly, the Government should



The Government should continue to provide research and development funding and grant support to enable the aviation sector to reach carbon neutrality more quickly.

provide financial aid to airports and continue to do so for some time. That meant, he said, that the recently announced business rates relief scheme, the Airport and Ground Operations Support Scheme, should be extended to cover not just the current financial year, but 2021/2022 as well. Similarly, the job retention scheme, which is due to expire at the end of April, should also be extended.

Thirdly, the Government should continue to provide research and

development funding and grant support to enable the aviation sector to reach carbon neutrality more quickly. Lees said that aviation needs to “work harder and faster” on this and Government support for sustainable fuels, including hydrogen and electricity, would help considerably. He said that this could be particularly important for the West of England, which is home to the UK’s most significant aviation and aerospace cluster, including such companies as Airbus, Rolls-Royce, and GKN. Lees was encouraged by the recent news that GKN Aerospace’s Global Technology Centre, based in Bristol, will be leading on the UK collaboration programme, called H2GEAR, to develop aircraft hydrogen propulsion systems, supported by £27m of funding from the Aerospace Technology Institute.

For now, Bristol Airport’s commercial passenger transport business has come to a virtual standstill. While 8.9 million passengers passed through the airport in 2019, the 2020 passenger numbers, which are currently being finalised, are likely to be less than 2.5 million. The early weeks of 2021 have been even worse, with day-to-

day passenger numbers in the low hundreds, around just 1% of 2019 levels.

Despite that grim background, Lees remains confident and optimistic about the airport’s future. Assuming that recovery begins in the second half of this year, Lees believes that Bristol could be back to 2019 passenger levels as early as 2023 or 2024. That would put the airport in the upper quartile of UK airport recovery, with Lees explaining that his confidence about the future is based on the fact that Bristol concentrates on short-haul and leisure routes and it is these two markets which he expects to recover most quickly.

Bristol Airport may be all but closed today, but Lees has his sights firmly set on a brighter future. He believes that will encompass improved route frequencies, helping the airport to gain market share back from the London airports. He also has some exciting aspirations for new medium-haul routes to key world cities such as Dubai, Istanbul and New York.

But first COVID-19 must be brought under control and Bristol Airport needs to win that planning appeal. ■

*Vijay Daryanani,
Gibraltar's Tourism
Minister*



GIBRALTAR AIRPORT TARGETS A MILLION PASSENGERS A YEAR AS AGREEMENT WITH SPAIN OPENS UP NEW HORIZONS

Gibraltar's Tourism Minister, Vijay Daryanani, has embarked on an ambitious project to attract new airlines to Gibraltar Airport and hopes to get as near as possible to a goal of a million passengers a year.



That would represent quite a leap from Gibraltar Airport's COVID-hit 2020 passenger total of 186,069 (compared to 491,405 in 2019). The airport's most successful year to date was in 2017, when the passenger total reached 571,184.

Daryanani is Minister for Business, Tourism, Transport and the Port of Gibraltar. A self-described aviation enthusiast, he was encouraged by Wizz Air's decision last year to launch flights from Gibraltar to London Luton, describing that as "a great achievement". Now he is working to persuade other airlines to launch new routes from Gibraltar to the UK and other countries, explaining: "One has to be ambitious. If we don't try, we won't know what we can achieve. I will try everything possible to make this happen for Gibraltar, and I have a good feeling about it".

Currently the scheduled passenger flights from Gibraltar are British Airways flights to Heathrow, EasyJet flights to Gatwick and Wizz Air flights to Luton. When COVID-19 restrictions ease, the airport expects to see the return of flights to London Luton and other UK destinations such as Bristol, Edinburgh, and

Manchester, as well as to Tangier and Casablanca in Morocco. It has recently been announced that Eastern Airlines are also due to commence operations in May with flights to Southampton and Birmingham.

Gibraltar Airport is a military airfield, owned and operated by the UK Ministry of Defence for use by the RAF, with a civilian air terminal, owned and operated by the Government of Gibraltar. The airfield

Terence Lopez, Gibraltar Airport Terminal Director



was constructed in 1939 and a new 380,000 sq. ft. terminal, four times bigger than the previous terminal, was completed in 2012.

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis the airport has provided a vital lifeline to the 32,000 inhabitants of the British Overseas Territory and to neighbouring parts of Spain. It has also handled a very large number of shipping crews either joining or signing off from their vessels at the Port of Gibraltar, which is just a few minutes from the airport. At the outset of the crisis Gibraltar had no local virus testing laboratory and all the test swabs taken had to be air-lifted to UK laboratories. More recently, the UK Government has provided Gibraltar with its vaccine supplies and a high proportion of the local population has already been vaccinated, including the third of the airport's workforce which comes from Spain.

The ambitious new route development strategy for the airport aims to build on a 31 December 2020 preliminary agreement between the Governments of Gibraltar, the UK and Spain. That agreement is intended to lead to a new treaty between the UK and the European Union which

will open up the whole of the EU's 26-country Schengen Area market, which includes Spain, to Gibraltar and its airport.

The agreement in principle on a framework for a potential treaty between the UK and the EU to govern the future relationship between the EU and Gibraltar will be the subject of further detailed negotiations which the two sides hope to conclude this summer. UK Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, told the House of Commons that the framework would "permit an absence of physical checks at the land border with Spain and ensure fluidity of movement of people and goods between Gibraltar and the EU". Gibraltar Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo, said the framework could be "the beginning of the creation of an area of shared prosperity, with greater economic growth which will greatly benefit our people and the people of the area around us also".

Under the terms of the framework agreement immigration controls will move from the existing land frontier between Gibraltar and Spain to Gibraltar Airport. The expectation is that both the Government of Gibraltar and the EU's border agency, Frontex, will carry out passport checks. Terence Lopez, the airport's Air Terminal Director, said details still needed to be agreed but it might require some redesign of the terminal to accommodate the new operational arrangements.

Lopez also expects that 2021 will be the year when a long-running saga relating to a 350-metre-long tunnel under the airport's runway is finally concluded. A £30 million tender for construction of the tunnel was awarded in 2008, but a legal dispute between the Government of Gibraltar and its Spanish contractor led to a long pause in the building work. Now that has been resolved, the project is in its final stages and Lopez anticipates that tunnel will be completed in the second half of this year. That will be very good news for all of the drivers, cyclists and pedestrians who must currently use



Throughout the COVID-19 crisis the airport has provided a vital lifeline to the 32,000 inhabitants of the British Overseas Territory and to neighbouring parts of Spain.

Winston Churchill Avenue, as the only road which links Gibraltar to mainland Spain. Extraordinarily, the avenue crosses the airport's runway and must be closed by airfield barriers and traffic lights for at least ten minutes every time a plane takes off or lands.

For Gibraltar-born Lopez, unable to cross the frontier with Spain until it opened for pedestrians in 1982,

when he was 18, the completion of the tunnel and the prospect of a Gibraltar treaty between the UK and the EU should make 2021 a year to remember. By his own admission, he has always been an optimist and these transformative developments look set to give him, his airport and Gibraltar much to be cheerful about. ■



HM Treasury

FREEPORTS BIDDING PROCESS - OPEN FOR APPLICATIONS

EIGHT ENGLISH AIRPORTS BID FOR FREEPORT STATUS

Eight airports in England have submitted bids to the Government to become freeports – but most will be disappointed, as Ministers are expected to give the go ahead to only seven of the 40 bids from sea, air and rail ports.

The airports which submitted bids by the 5 February deadline were Bournemouth, Carlisle Lake District, Doncaster Sheffield, East Midlands, Gatwick, Heathrow, Newcastle and Teesside.

All will be assessed next month by a panel chaired by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, with decisions expected by June.

Designed to attract domestic and

international investment, areas given freeport status will benefit from tax reliefs, simplified customs procedures, streamlined planning processes and government support to promote regeneration and innovation.

Bournemouth Airport linked up with Poole Harbour and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council to submit a bid, which proposes a new customs-exempt freight corridor between the airport and the port. It

All will be assessed next month by a panel chaired by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, with decisions expected by June.

also includes a new aviation centre of excellence aimed at addressing skills shortages in the aviation sector.

An airport and aviation business park spokesman said freeport designation would give the region an opportunity to “leverage our connectivity and post-Brexit cargo and logistics”.

Carlisle Lake District Airport is part of the Heart of the UK Freeport Cumbria bid, led by Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership with Barrow Port, the Port of Workington and local councils.

John Mallinson, Leader of Carlisle City Council, said: “The bid represents an exciting opportunity to link three of the county’s premier transport hubs to provide a comprehensive offer that is big enough to enable economies of scale and significantly improve competitiveness. The airport would be able to offer auxiliary land capacity for some offshore wind manufacturing. It could also offer drone logistics manufacturing and services to support the offshore wind industry as well as providing the potential for just-in-time air freight”.

Doncaster Sheffield Airport is part of South Yorkshire’s freeport bid, which also includes the A19 Business Park (owned by UK land and property regeneration company, Harworth Group) and the rail freight terminal and logistics hub, iPort (owned by international real estate developer, Verdion)

Robert Hough, Chair of Peel Airports Group, which includes Doncaster Sheffield Airport, said: “Ports and airports are well known as hubs for global trade and investment. Freeport status would only enhance that. By bringing together the UK’s first strategic rail port at iPort and one of the longest runways in the UK with capacity to grow at Doncaster Sheffield Airport, Peel, Harworth and Verdion have proven track

records in delivering transformational projects, helping to create jobs and opportunities for local people”.

East Midlands Airport, the UK’s largest freight airport, is part of an East Midlands consortium bid led by two local enterprise partnerships. The bid is based around the East Midlands Airport Gateway and Industrial Cluster, as well as two other industrial sites in the region.

Clare James, the airport’s Managing Director, said that a successful bid could create thousands of jobs for local people. Describing the airport as “a key regional and national gateway for Britain’s exports and imports”, she said it would have “a key role to play in helping the Government fulfil its ambition of a ‘global Britain’”. She said: “As the port of entry and exit, we bring to the Freeport bid, along with our road haulage and rail operating partners, the connectivity that is one of this region’s unique strengths”.

Gatwick Airport is at the heart of a Gatwick Freeport bid submitted by the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership.

Stewart Wingate, the airport’s Chief Executive Officer, said: “It is well documented what a devastating impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had to date on Gatwick and the local economy. As we start to shape our recovery plans I believe a successful freeport bid at Gatwick would help to ensure a positive future for people, place and businesses within Crawley and the wider region”.

Heathrow Airport is seeking “associated freeport status” to link with a regional airport- based site elsewhere in the UK.

Nigel Milton, the airport’s Director of Communications, said: “An associated freeport at Heathrow provides an opportunity to accelerate the recovery and support regions around the UK, and boost industries and businesses across our local communities that have been negatively impacted by the

pandemic. Just as manufacturing and high-tech clusters have been developed around Heathrow in West London and the South East, our position as a connecting port enables the specialisms from other sites around the UK to reach opportunities throughout the world”.

Newcastle International Airport and Nissan are partners in a North East England freeport bid. The business and public sector partnership says that, if successful, its bid could create 60,000 jobs and £2.7bn of private sector investment.

Nick Jones, the airport’s Chief Executive Officer, said: “Fast and frequent connections to growth markets are key to the success of the freeport and the advancement of the North East’s key business sectors. Air connectivity will strengthen the North East England freeport proposition and will help to drive productivity improvements through logistics supply chains, with the ultimate aim of supporting the growth sectors in the region – from pharmaceuticals and life sciences to technology and advanced manufacturing. The airport is delighted to play a role in the across-region partnership that will deliver this project”.

Teesside International Airport is part of a multi-site Teesside bid put together by Tees Valley Mayor, Ben Houchen, which also includes the ports of Middlesbrough and Hartlepool. Houchen says that a successful bid could lead to 18,000 new jobs being created and increase inward investment by over £1.4bn.

Phil Forster, Interim Managing Director of the airport, said: “This freeport bid is a game-changing opportunity for Teesside International Airport. It covers a host of sites, including ours, to maximise the benefits across the whole region and will help us to play an even more strategic role in the future of the Tees Valley”. ■

UK GOVERNMENT SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD TO DEVELOP A GLOBALLY RECOGNISED DIGITAL VACCINE CERTIFICATE

says IATA UK chief, Simon McNamara.

Last summer, after months of national lockdown, the Government's introduction of travel corridors briefly gave the industry hope for a resurgence. In the end, a meaningful recovery failed to materialise as the policy was hampered by fluctuating infection rates, resulting in key travel corridors shutting at short notice. Many consumers balked at the prospect of quarantine and demand soon evaporated. By autumn, all signs of recovery had stalled and the situation turned dramatically worse over the year-end holiday season, as more severe travel restrictions were imposed in the face of new outbreaks and new strains of COVID-19. Across the globe a similar story played out and 2020 saw the sharpest traffic decline in aviation history, with global demand (measured in revenue passenger kilometres) falling by 65.9% compared to 2019 levels.

IATA's latest forecast for 2021

predicts global traffic will increase by only 13 percent over 2020 if severe travel restrictions persist, which would leave demand at only 38 percent of its 2019 level. The industry has been mostly supportive of Governments, recognising they must take whatever steps necessary to keep their citizens safe, but the

Across the globe a similar story played out and 2020 saw the sharpest traffic decline in aviation history, with global demand (measured in revenue passenger kilometres) falling by 65.9% compared to 2019 levels.

severe economic consequences of the pandemic are already evident and they have been particularly acutely felt by UK aviation. The reality is that without an upturn of fortunes in 2021, more jobs will be put at risk, the UK's collapse in global connectivity will be further entrenched, and British competitiveness will be damaged at a time when it is needed most.

That is why we are calling on the UK Government to partner with industry to develop a comprehensive roadmap to re-open UK aviation, safeguarding its world class reputation and ensuring the industry continues to be a cornerstone of the UK economy. Even though we do not yet know precisely when restrictions will be relaxed, this roadmap cannot wait. Aviation is a logistically and operationally complex industry and it is also highly regulated to ensure the highest standards of safety and security. Unlike other

parts of the economy like retail or hospitality, aviation cannot simply be 're-opened' at short notice. Consequently, planning needs to start now if we are to be prepared when we reach the turning point of the crisis.

Working with BAR-UK, we have developed a pathway document which sets out a possible way forward. Seeking to avoid the rushed and often compromised evolution of policy last year, the journey out of the crisis towards a normalised travel experience provides an opportunity to plan, implement and communicate much more effectively.

There are plenty of moving parts in the equation and any strategy to re-open international borders must find ways of managing the relationship between vaccinations and testing. IATA has long supported the introduction of a pre-departure rapid testing regime and so we believe mandatory pre-departure testing should be maintained as the ongoing primary measure. Government should therefore work to phase out post-arrival restrictions.

In parallel, the Government must also carefully consider how a growing number of vaccinated passengers reduces the risk profile of travel. We do not believe vaccinations should be mandatory for travel, but it is reasonable to expect vaccinated passengers be subject to fewer measures with exemptions from testing and self-isolation requirements. Government should therefore work with industry on an approach to vaccinated passengers, including those vaccinated in other countries, and how to record vaccination records for travel purposes. A globally recognised common digital vaccine certificate will be an essential element of this approach.

Airlines are already working on technology solutions which are already being trialled by airlines. Therefore, we believe that it is beneficial for governments to

“We are calling on the UK Government to partner with industry to develop a comprehensive roadmap to re-open UK aviation, safeguarding its world class reputation and ensuring the industry continues to be a cornerstone of the UK economy”.

*Simon McNamara,
IATA Country
Manager, UK &
Ireland.*



quickly evaluate and support the digital health wallet applications being developed by a number of providers, including the IATA Travel Pass. These digital solutions better enable airlines to verify passengers' testing or vaccination record, and give governments access to this information, while safeguarding personal data privacy. A digital solution such as the IATA Travel Pass can also benefit border processing upon arrival, by minimising queues.

Lastly, re-establishing connectivity can only be done with international cooperation. Governments are already seeing how challenging that

will be without global standards for vaccines or tests. This puts a spotlight on the urgency of the essential work being done by WHO, OECD and ICAO. International cooperation will be key to the eventual development of global standards so that the requirements of one country can be easily followed by travellers originating in other jurisdictions. With the UK hosting the G7 this year, here is an early opportunity for 'Global Britain' to take a lead. ■

Simon McNamara is IATA Country Manager, UK & Ireland.



HOPES RISE FOR STANSTED EXPANSION AFTER LOCAL COUNCIL SUGGESTS PLANNING PERMISSION COULD BE GRANTED WITH CONDITIONS

Hopes are rising that London Stansted Airport may secure approval for an extra 8 million passengers a year after the local council indicated it could support the growth plan with appropriate conditions.





In January last year, Uttlesford District Council's Planning Committee voted to reject the airport's plan, triggering an appeal by Stansted's owner, Manchester Airports Group, which is currently being considered by a public inquiry.

The plan continues to be vigorously opposed by the Stop Stansted Expansion pressure group, but the Council's opening statement to the inquiry suggests that its focus is now on securing conditions for planning permission which would mitigate the environmental impact of the airport's growth plan.

Stansted Airport, for its part, has already committed to planning conditions and a mitigation package which would seek to minimise the external impact of its operations, including a tightening of its permitted noise contour.

Reacting to the Council's change of approach, Stop Stansted Expansion, said it could not "hide its disappointment that Uttlesford District Council officials have now withdrawn most of their objections to Manchester Airport Group's expansion plans for Stansted, subject to a few hollow conditions".

Stansted Airport had sought planning permission for two new taxiway links to the existing runway and nine additional aircraft stands at the airport to accommodate an eventual

passenger throughput of 43 million passengers per year (8 million more than the 35 million currently permitted).

In 2018 officers recommended that permission should be granted and that was accepted by the then Planning Committee. However, the 2019 local elections resulted in the previous administration being replaced by a 'Residents for Uttlesford' administration and in January 2020 the new Planning Committee refused the airport's

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application. The current public inquiry (totally virtual, using Zoom) opened on 12 January. A three-person panel of inspectors is hearing evidence for and against Stansted's proposals.

Manchester Airport Group's Chief of Staff, Tim Hawkins, who has been closely involved in the development of Stansted over many years, told the inquiry that Stansted's expansion plan is in line with Government policy supporting the best use of existing capacity.

He said that the Government's 2018 "making best use" policy "recognises the significant benefits that better utilisation of existing capacity would generate for the economy, consumers and people working in the aviation industry, as well as the importance of good international and domestic connectivity the UK's future". The Government's policy statement, he suggested, should "naturally carry considerable weight in any decision-making process concerning airports seeking to make use of their existing capacity".

Hawkins told the inquiry that a senior Government official had confirmed that making best use of Stansted's existing runway was precisely the type of project that the Government had in mind when developing its policy. There could be no doubt, he said, that the Government was supportive of Stansted bringing forward its current proposals for local determination.

Following a local consultation exercise the airport had submitted an application in 2018 which included a tighter limit on the airport's noise footprint than an earlier proposal and an enhanced sound insulation grant scheme for residential properties close to the airport. In refusing permission, it was clear that Uttlesford District Council had not attached any real weight to Government policy, which also states that aviation carbon emissions are a matter to be determined nationally, not locally.

Hawkins said that since Manchester Airports Group had acquired Stansted annual passenger numbers had increased by 10 million, reaching 28 million passengers by the end of 2019. Despite the immediate challenges presented by COVID-19, the Group remained committed to securing permission for expansion, which, he said, was "a clear statement of our confidence in Stansted's future and the important role that it will play in supporting economic growth in the long-term".

Looking ahead, he said that the granting of planning permission would make Stansted "a more attractive proposition for airlines" and assist the airport's targeting of new long-haul routes to China, the Middle East and North Africa. He noted that existing Stansted customers, Ryanair and Emirates had both written in support of lifting the passenger numbers cap, but added that lifting the cap would, in addition, "help foster competition and choice as it will encourage new airlines to enter the market"

The inquiry also heard evidence from a wide range of business supporters of Stansted's growth plan, including the CBI, the Essex and Suffolk Chambers of Commerce, Visit East of England and AstraZeneca, the pharmaceutical company which worked with Oxford University to develop a COVID-19 vaccine.

Freddie Hopkinson, the CBI's senior transport policy adviser, said

The Stansted Airport Public Inquiry is expected to conclude with closing submissions on 9 March and a site visit on 10 March.

that Stansted Airport is a major international gateway not only for the East of England and North London but for the entire UK. He told the inquiry that a wide range of firms had suffered severe adverse consequences from the UK's decline in international connectivity during the coronavirus pandemic and businesses therefore recognised the strategic importance of investment in increasing capacity at Stansted during the recovery for their long-term competitiveness.

Expanding capacity would mean that the airport would be able to increase passenger volumes on long-haul routes such as the flights already in operation to the UAE and India, which are of significant economic value to the UK. He said that the foundation of an East of England/China forum suggests that there is an in-region demand from businesses to establish further long-haul routes to East Asia, further widening access to export markets.

Dr Andy Williams, AstraZeneca's UK Vice President Strategy, told the inquiry: "We have seen with the pandemic response that the UK life science sector – and in particular Cambridge – has played its part and demonstrated that we are a global asset for the UK". He said that the company, which employs 3,500 people at its Cambridge headquarters, is heavily reliant on global talent to drive innovation. He emphasised the importance of its employees being able to travel internationally and said that, with the proposed new train station at Cambridge South, adjacent to AstraZeneca's headquarters, they would be able to reach Stansted Airport in less than 30 minutes.

The Stansted Airport Public Inquiry is expected to conclude with closing submissions on 9 March and a site visit on 10 March. After weighing all the evidence presented to them, the planning inspectors will issue a decision letter containing their conclusions on the appeal and their reasons for allowing or dismissing it. ■

NEW DONCASTER SHEFFIELD AIRPORT MANAGING DIRECTOR SAYS HIS AIRPORT IS “SET TO RIDE THE STORM”

The Airport Operator asked Chris Harcombe, recently promoted Managing Director of Doncaster Sheffield Airport, for his perspective on a tumultuous year for aviation and the airport’s plan for recovery:

At the start of 2020, we were looking forward to a record-breaking year in terms of passenger numbers, we had a start date for the first phase of our £10m terminal development and were adding the final touches to our 15th anniversary celebrations. Then the pandemic hit, and these plans were furloughed along with a number of our team. Our focus moved from discretionary travel to repatriation and we saw a major spike in our cargo throughput, well ahead of forecasts.

There is no doubt that 2020 was a devastating year for the aviation industry, yet we remained operational throughout. We managed to buck the trend when we became the second UK base for

Wizz Air. The operator saw a gap in the market for ultra-low-cost travel in an under-served region and our easy, friendly, relaxed brand complements the Wizz aspiration to provide greener, efficient and affordable air travel. Wizz also announced 13 new routes, and coupled with existing destinations from the airport, including 31 with Tui, we now serve 46 destinations across the world.

The impact of Coronavirus highlighted the strategic importance of the role we have played delivering vital PPE to the NHS frontline and perishable goods and foodstuffs to supermarket shelves. If anything, this has added to our resolve and we have used this time to make some important changes to the structure and focus of the senior management

team.

I am very proud to be part of the dedicated team at Doncaster Sheffield Airport since 2006, when I joined as Aviation Analyst, advancing to Aviation Development Director. At the start of 2021 I became Managing Director with responsibility across the business including financial, operational and commercial performance. My focus will be to strengthen the performance of DSA as the UK’s best regional airport and continue to develop the Cargo and general business aviation activity.

In tandem with this, Kate Stow has expanded her previous role of Marketing and Corporate Affairs director by taking on the role of Director of Aviation Development



*Chris Harcombe,
Doncaster Sheffield
Airport Managing
Director*

and Corporate Affairs. We're also expanding the team to develop the aviation business alongside corporate affairs activity. We've always been a closely engaged management team here at DSA and Kate and I have worked together from the early days of the airport and our 15-year history with the airport will stand us in good stead for the next phase of our growth and development.

This has been a tough twelve months for the aviation industry and even as I'm writing this, further quarantine restrictions are coming into play. It's been no different here at DSA and everyone has pulled together to do what they can. In some cases that means taking furlough and we have recognised that neither continuing to work or taking time off is an ideal situation for anyone. I'm still concerned about the impact that the past twelve months has had on everyone's wellbeing and it's my sincere wish that we can get back to some level of normality as soon as is safely possible.

That said, there is work to be done in the present, and we are determined to bounce back in the best condition possible. We have worked incredibly hard to create an award-winning easy, friendly and relaxed service, and we are about to begin phase one of a three-phased terminal development

programme, and customers will begin to see changes during the year ahead.

As well as a deserved refresh to the terminal building, based largely on customer feedback, we're expanding our retail offering, adding new gate bridges and expanding the arrivals hall and security search area. We're also planning to implement self-service bag drops, extra border control points and arrival gates so we can provide an efficient and smooth passenger experience for our customers as they pass through the terminal.

Conversely, the current situation provides us with the ideal opportunity to carry out the development with minimal disruption to passengers. We'll be ready for when international travel takes off once more and we can welcome back our passengers in style.

Last year was undoubtedly the most challenging year on record for the aviation industry and we anticipate an 85% drop in passenger number against 2019 full year figures, which is very much in line with the aviation sector. We're positive about passenger numbers for 2021 as we have already seen an uplift in bookings for Q2, due in no small part to immense pent-up demand. Operators have done everything they

can to give customers confidence offering favourable terms, flexible booking options, rigorous COVID-secure health and safety measures and discounted 'Fit to Fly' PCR test kits.

The aviation industry cannot do any more, we now need a globally accepted and adopted COVID strategy for international travel. We need the Government to provide some clarity so we can offer our customers the assurances they so desperately need. The aviation industry needs sector-specific support and it is essential that we get a thorough and practical pre-flight testing policy in place, to get the industry back up and running once more.

Indeed, this has been a tough time for the aviation industry. However, Doncaster Sheffield Airport has a long-term strategic vision set to ride the storm. It's a significant economic catalyst in this area of the North and is playing a vital role in the government's 'Levelling Up' agenda. Investors have backed the business to the tune of £300m investment and continue to invest in its future with the £10m terminal development and land acquisition. ■

Chris Harcombe is Managing Director of Doncaster Sheffield Airport.

AGS AIRPORTS LEADS TRIAL TO DELIVER A SCOTLAND-WIDE DRONE DELIVERY NETWORK FOR ESSENTIAL MEDICAL SUPPLIES

AGS Airports, which owns and manages Aberdeen, Glasgow and Southampton Airports, is leading a consortium to develop and trial a distribution network to transport essential medicines, blood, organs and other medical supplies throughout Scotland.

The consortium, which brings together 14 organisations, including the University of Strathclyde and NATS, secured £1.5 million from the UK Industrial Strategy Future Flight Challenge Fund to demonstrate how drones can enhance access to essential medical supplies, especially

in rural areas.

Starting in December last year and scheduled to run until spring of next year, the project will involve live drone trials and will consider public safety, security and noise levels. It will design pathways to ensure that the drones can safely share airspace with civil aviation and develop the ground infrastructure needed to recharge the drones and the systems to control them while flying.

The first of its kind in the UK, the drone delivery network will seek to connect hospitals, pathology

laboratories, distribution centres and GP surgeries across Scotland.

Derek Provan, Chief Executive of AGS Airports, said: "This project has the potential to completely revolutionise the way in which healthcare services are delivered in Scotland. Not only does drone technology have the ability to speed up the delivery of critical medical supplies, it could reduce waiting times for test results and help provide equity of care between urban and remote rural communities". ■



LONDON LUTON AIRPORT SEEKS TO INCREASE PASSENGER CAP

London Luton Airport has submitted an application to Luton Council to increase its annual passenger cap from 18 million to 19 million.

The application, which follows a public consultation last year, will not require any physical changes or new construction at the airport and the airport will continue to operate within its existing terminal infrastructure.

Airport CEO, Alberto Martin, said: "Aviation has always played a crucial role in the UK and local economy, through the jobs it supports, the direct economic contribution it makes and its support for international trade. As people start to travel again and the UK's economic recovery begins, we want the airport to be in the best position to continue to support these things. By submitting this application now, we are preparing the airport for future success and creating reassurance for the thousands of people and businesses who rely on us".

This month also saw the end of a 15-month consultation on proposed changes to arrival routes for flights into the airport. The consultation, jointly sponsored by the airport and by NATS, was on two options to simplify the routes and separate them from Stansted. Uniquely in the UK, the two airports currently share arrival routes and the same two holds. The proposals, establishing a new hold for Luton, are designed to reduce delays and ensure safety. Both deploy Performance Based Navigation. The airport and NATS expect to submit a formal Airspace Change Proposal to the Civil Aviation Authority in June, with the change likely to be implemented from next year.



*Alberto Martin, CEO,
London Luton Airport*



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