

THE AIRPORT OPERATOR

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE AIRPORT OPERATORS ASSOCIATION

AOA
THE VOICE OF UK AIRPORTS

90
YEARS

**2024 WILL BE A SPECIAL
YEAR FOR THE AOA
AS WE CELEBRATE OUR
90TH ANNIVERSARY
AS "THE VOICE OF UK
AIRPORTS"**



Features

EDINBURGH AIRPORT
heads for record summer

**AIRPORT CONSULTATIVE
COMMITTEES**
are trusted critical friends

**TEESSIDE INTERNATIONAL
AIRPORT** *focussing on
non-aeronautical revenues*

**AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER
SHORTAGE** *an issue for years to come*

AOA
THE VOICE OF UK AIRPORTS
WINTER 2024



THE AOA IS PLEASED TO WORK WITH ITS CORPORATE PARTNERS, GOLD AND SILVER MEMBERS

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KAREN DEE

Introduction to The Airport Operator



Welcome to the first edition of Airport Operator Magazine in 2024.

I hope that the start of the year has been a productive and operationally smooth one for you and your organisations. 2024 promises to be a busy year, operationally and more widely, with passenger numbers forecast finally to recover to, and even surpass, those last seen in 2019. The country is also set to go to the polls to elect a new government in Westminster that will set the agenda for the next four or five years.

Our work with the political parties in the run up to the election will focus on providing airports and the wider aviation sector with a stable, sustainable and affordable landscape. These three facets are vitally important if the UK is to remain a competitive place for investors, businesses, airlines and international visitors to come. Without them, we risk losing out on economic growth, spending and jobs created as a result of those coming to our shores.

At the same time, regardless of who wins the next election, aviation must continue to show it is taking

responsibility for reducing its carbon emissions. That is why it was so important that the end of last year saw the first flight powered by 100% sustainable aviation fuel. These new methods of powering aircraft, which also include hydrogen and battery electric, form a key plank of the industry's road map to net zero, and political parties must be aware of these developments.

And so, the team at the AOA has had a busy start to the year. There have been meetings with new ministers in Whitehall and Holyrood, engagement with civil servants over airspace modernisation and new security technologies and procedures, submissions for regulatory and government consultations and working with partners on various campaign priorities for this year. All this activity is laying the groundwork for the post-election period.

Planning is also progressing on a very full programme of events that AOA has planned for 2024. This includes our upcoming 90th anniversary gala dinner, which will celebrate everything we have achieved as well as look ahead to the year to come. Our first airport conference is also set to take place in April, focussing on airspace and air traffic control and the challenges and opportunities UK aviation faces. I hope you will be able to join us for these, and the other events we will be running this year.

Elsewhere, AOA has been working with airports to prepare its response to the government's consultation on slots reform. The team has also made a submission ahead of the upcoming Budget, focussing on pushing the Chancellor to allow airports to set up arrivals duty-free stores and to reinstate duty-free shopping for international visitors. Finally, we have also responded to the CAA's statutory charges consultation, calling for a freeze in the amount of money levied owing to the challenging economic environment airports find themselves in.

I hope you enjoy this quarter's issue of Airport Operator. This includes articles looking at the ongoing challenges around the shortage in air traffic controllers, as well as a summary of the AOA's Operations and Safety Conference. We also hear about the latest developments from airports up and down the country, including Bristol, Birmingham, Southampton, Gatwick, Islay and City of Derry. There is also an article celebrating the AOA as it enters its 90th anniversary year, with a look back at some of the history of the organisation. Enjoy! ■

Karen Dee. Chief Executive

IN THIS ISSUE

03 Introduction to The Airport Operator

04 AOA membership for just £5

06

Gordon Dewar, Chief Executive, Edinburgh Airport



10 John Beasley, Director and Global Aviation Skills Leader, Arup

14 Islay, a small airport with a big future

18 Steve Frazer, MD, City of Derry Airport

21 UK airport consultative Committees

23 Phil Forster, MD Teesside International Airport

27 Government slot reform plans

29 Operations & Safety Airport Conference

32 Health and Safety Awards

34 New scheme to discourage rogue parking operators

35 Airspace and Air Traffic Services Working Group

37 From Around the Sector

AOA MEMBERSHIP FOR JUST £5 – THOSE WERE THE DAYS

“The matter of subscriptions was raised, and it was agreed that the sum of £5 would be sufficient” – that was the decision of the AOA’s first meeting on 22 March 1934.

The bargain offer lasted just two years before it was decided that “any owner or operator of an aerodrome or landing ground could be a member with a subscription of £10 per annum”.

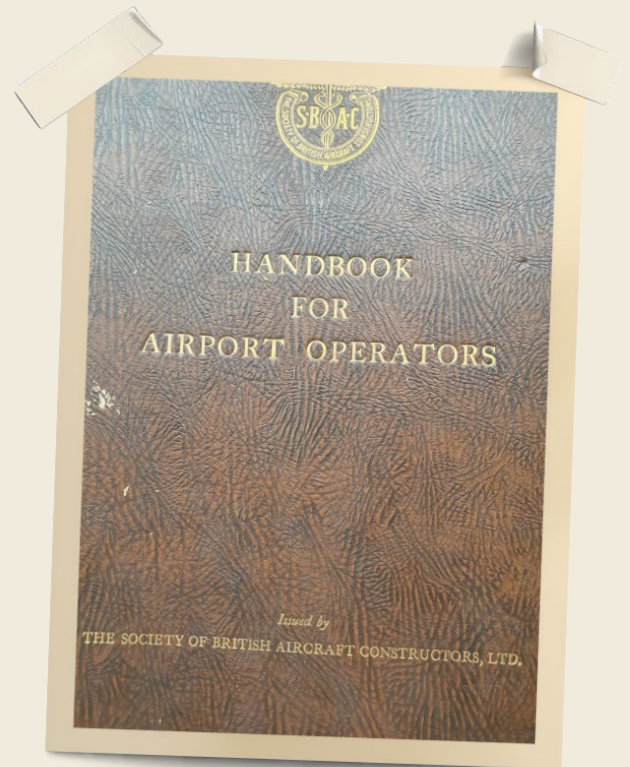
After the war things rapidly went from bad to worse. At a meeting in 1951 members were reminded that subscription rates had not been increased since the 1930’s “and it was felt that an increase was due. This was agreed unanimously, and the subscription was increased to £20”. The rest is history.

Still, members and their guests will have a good opportunity to drown their sorrows at the AOA’s Annual Dinner on Tuesday 19 March at London’s Grosvenor House Hotel, where the Association aims to deliver “an appropriately celebratory atmosphere” as it celebrates its 90th anniversary as “the voice of UK airports”.

It all began, really, with the Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII. Speaking at a conference of local authority representatives

in December 1933 he made the case for more landing grounds and aerodromes, telling delegates that whenever he visited a local authority “I have sent my pilot down beforehand to see how near that municipality I can land”, helpfully defining a landing ground as “an open space with a wind indicator and a telephone”. He concluded “We have made aeroplanes to fly where we want. We must now see that they can stop where they want”.

With that Royal endorsement ringing in their ears, the Society of British Aircraft Constructors decided that the time had come to establish an Airport Operators Division. At its first meeting in 1934 nine airports were represented, including Bristol and Gatwick Aerodrome. 90 years later the AOA has 51 airports



in membership, with Bristol and Gatwick still among them.

The AOA's foundation came just over 30 years after the Wright brothers had made the first controlled, sustained flight of an engine-powered heavier than air aircraft. The UK's first powered flight took off from Farnborough, now also an AOA member, in 1908, with Wild West showman, Samuel Cody, at the controls. A year later, Louis Blériot flew across the English Channel. The UK's first international airport opened at Croydon in 1920. By the time of the AOA's first meeting airports had also opened at Biggin Hill, the Great West Aerodrome (later Heathrow), Leeds Bradford, Southampton and Liverpool.

Subjects discussed at that first meeting included town planning in the vicinity of aerodromes, business rates and aircraft landing fees. One member noted that there was "a considerable diversity of practice" on airline fees and he felt that "something should be done to put matters on a more satisfactory footing". But the meeting decided this was "a difficult subject" and that "the present stage of development of civil aviation and air transport might make it impossible to agree any standard fees".

A subsequent meeting considered a suggestion that aerodrome operators might act as booking agents for airlines. The proposal was considered but the meeting decided "it would be very undesirable for aerodromes to act in this capacity. The suggestion was turned down".

In 1935 there was a discussion on the definitions of the words "airport" and "aerodrome". Members expressed a preference for the word "airport". It was agreed to refer the question to the Air Ministry. The Ministry's response is not recorded. The same meeting considered the suggestion that an individual should be appointed to "put out propaganda to the press on behalf of the Association". The minutes fail to record whether or not

this suggestion was adopted.

A year before the outbreak of the Second World War AOA Council members visited Berlin to meet their German counterparts, flying from Croydon on a KLM Douglas DC airliner to Amsterdam Schiphol. After



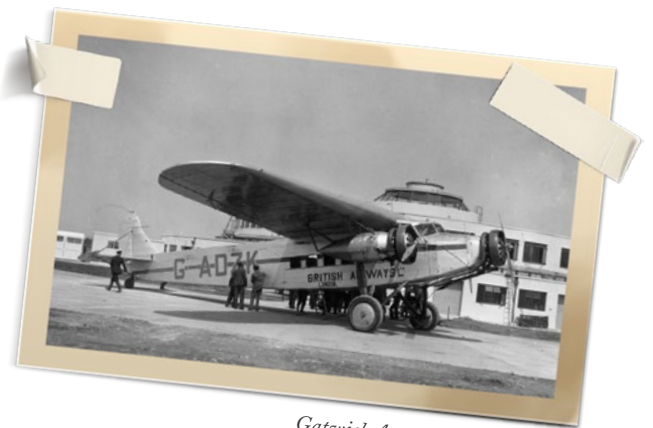
Bristol Airport in the 1930's



The Prince of Wales

Amsterdam they were "thrown about very badly", entering "a bad storm with a good deal of lightning which was not too pleasant" before landing at Berlin Tempelhof, perhaps the biggest and most impressive airport of its time. The meeting seemed to go well, with the AOA declaring that "we thought nothing but good could come from a frank interchange of views on operational questions, not only in promoting friendship between the different countries, but in pooling our ideas and experiences we should be benefitting world civil aviation".

Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, two days after Hitler invaded Poland. With a handful of exceptions, UK civil aviation ceased on that day and was not fully restored until 1 January 1946, the same date that ownership



Gatwick Aerodrome in the 1930's

of the Heathrow airfield was transferred from the Air Ministry to the Ministry of Civil Aviation. Heathrow fully opened for civilian use on 31 May 1946.

From 1946 the number of airports in the UK grew considerably. By 2019, just before the Covid pandemic, the UK's Civil Aviation Authority was reporting that 300m passengers a year were passing through the country's airports. That total has yet to be exceeded. ■

EDINBURGH AIRPORT HEADS FOR RECORD SUMMER AS TRANSATLANTIC TRAFFIC BOOMS

Edinburgh Airport has become the UK's second-largest entry point for international visitors as Americans flock to Scotland during the peak summer months.



Gordon Dewar



Chief Executive, Gordon Dewar, told The Airport Operator that the airport is growing at double the UK average thanks to the rising number of passengers from the US and Canada and the post-Covid recovery of European and domestic traffic. He expresses confidence that 2024 will be a record year, with the total number of passengers likely to exceed 15m (compared to 14.7m in 2019 and 14.4m last year).

Asked why the North American routes have been so successful for Edinburgh, his answer was simple – “they make money”. He said that major airlines from the US and Canada had decided to back Edinburgh as a hub because of compelling evidence that it “outshone” competitor airports in terms of profitability.

In May the airport will welcome JetBlue to Scotland as the airline launches its first ever Scottish route to New York with daily flights, competing with both United and Delta, who also fly to Washington DC and Chicago (United) and Atlanta and Boston (Delta). Virgin Atlantic flies to Orlando.

Booming inbound US tourism

is a key factor in the success of the routes between the US and Edinburgh, with Americans coming to Scotland accounting for 75% of the passenger traffic on the routes in the peak summer months. VisitScotland Chief Executive, Malcolm Roughead, has described the US as Scotland’s most important global market “bringing visitors who often stay longer and spend more”.

Meanwhile the Canadian airline, WestJet, is making Edinburgh Airport its home in Scotland as it introduces another two routes to its operations from the Scottish capital, adding Toronto and Halifax to its existing Calgary route, marking the first time Edinburgh has had a direct flight to Halifax, the capital of Nova Scotia. The additional Canadian flights will see Edinburgh accommodate more flights to North America than ever before.

Similarly, the airport will accommodate more flights to China than ever before this year as Hainan Airlines adds nine weeks to its 2023 schedule for flights between Edinburgh (the only Scottish airport to offer direct flights to China) and Beijing. Dewar is hopeful that there could be flights to other Chinese destinations soon as well as a

possible new link to India.

Closer to home, Edinburgh continues to add European routes with new flights to Chambéry, Tirana, Sardinia, San Sebastian and Stuttgart. Dewar anticipates that flights between Edinburgh and Germany will be a particularly popular draw during the UEFA European football championships between 14 June and 14 July.

Domestic routes have been a little slower to recover than international routes post-Covid and the collapse of Flybe. All the previous Flybe routes have now been backfilled by EasyJet, Loganair and Ryanair, but Dewar acknowledges that for now the routes typically operate with lower frequencies and smaller

“2024 will be a record year, with the total number of passengers likely to exceed 15m (compared to 14.7m in 2019 and 14.4m last year)”.

aircraft, reflecting the incomplete recovery of business traffic.

In January this year the ownership of Edinburgh Airport changed, with the acquisition of Global Infrastructure Partners (GIP) by BlackRock. Asked what effect he expects that to have on the airport's operations, Dewar replied "none at all", explaining that the GIP people with responsibility for the airport have retained that responsibility within BlackRock.

Following a pause during the pandemic, Edinburgh Airport is now in the middle of its biggest ever capital investment programme, with runway resurfacing planned for next year and work in hand to create new terminal gates and stands. Like other large UK airports, Edinburgh has been making a substantial investment in next generation security scanners, with most expected to be operational in time for the UK Government's June deadline. Discussions have been held with the Department for Transport on a possible partial extension until the end of this year.

One of Edinburgh's most important investments has been in its eleven-acre solar farm which went live at the end of last month and will help the airport to meet its commitment to self-generate 25% of its energy needs by 2030. The 9.7MW solar farm, with 1.5MW of battery storage, will also supply electric vehicle charging points for staff and passengers. A total of 40 EV chargers are now available across three of the airport's car parks. Looking ahead, the airport also sees an opportunity over the next 10 to 15 years to meet the energy needs of a planned new £2bn development with 7,000 homes adjacent to the airport site.

With good progress being made on meeting its Net Zero targets for the carbon emissions that it directly controls, Edinburgh Airport is now increasingly focussed on steps that it can take to reduce Scope 3 emissions, where it has influence, but not control. Key elements of this are road traffic and fuel for planes. Dewar acknowledges that these are



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more challenging but says that the airport will do what it can to help, including with the provision of sustainable aviation fuels.

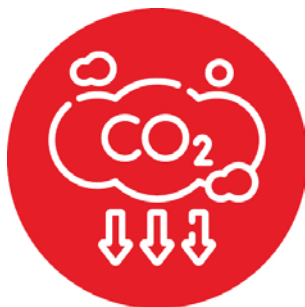
As the UK heads towards a General Election later this year, Dewar emphasises that he is keen to engage with politicians of all parties to explore how business and government can work together to achieve common goals. Dismissing suggestions that

demand management could have a role to play in meeting aviation's environmental targets as "a crazy, catastrophically bad idea", he says that politicians should instead see a successful UK aviation sector as an important ally in helping them to achieve their objectives. Noting the key role that airports play in supporting connectivity and economic growth, they should be "front and centre" of such discussions, he concludes. ■



*John Beasley, Director
and Global Aviation
Skills Leader, Arup*

ARUP



LEAN IN TO THE ENERGY CHALLENGE FOR COLLABORATIVE AIRPORT DECARBONISATION

*By John Beasley, Director and Global
Aviation Skills Leader, Arup*



The aviation industry expects to achieve a new milestone in 2024: global passenger numbers are forecast by the Airports Council International to reach 9.4 billion – exceeding the previous record of 9.2 billion passengers set in 2019. And this despite the headline price of jet fuel still being higher than its pre-pandemic peak – though one might argue about the effect of inflation in reducing the real cost. Nevertheless, demand for air travel remains buoyant, albeit displaying marked differences between global regions. It is no coincidence that Arup has seen an increase in investor advisory work linked to airport ownership of late.

These last five, turbulent years bear witness to some major changes, yet eternal truths also remain in this industry. The most notable change is that net zero targets have become embedded in many national, sectoral, and corporate plans. In a sense, that’s the easy part. We are now facing the challenges of converting good intentions into meaningful actions. If net zero targets could be achieved at zero net cost, and there were no supply side limitations, then progress would be easy. But this is not the case.

Take Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) for example. At the last IATA

Aviation Energy Forum meeting it was clear that the scale and pace of SAF supplies to meet demand remain significant challenges, yet so much of aviation’s decarbonisation road map depends upon it.

Although complex in its delivery, sustainable aviation can be addressed through the realisation of two major priorities: a transition to sustainable fuels, and the development of sustainable airports. At Arup, we see a place for the former in impacting the latter. Given the majority of the aviation industry’s emissions come from flight, airport operators can influence Scope 3 emissions by ensuring airlines have the incentives and infrastructure in place to ease use of SAFs at their airports.

Energy leaders at the Forum were clear: SAFs will always be more expensive than typical, historical prices of conventional fuel – perhaps twice as expensive. Of course, the use of conventional fuels can be made more expensive by direct taxes or through indirect means such as mandates and buyout prices. But the message is clear: the cost of energy for aviation will rise.

At Arup we see a key discussion developing about whether or not to adopt some form of ‘book and

“Sustainable aviation can be addressed through the realisation of two major priorities: a transition to sustainable fuels, and the development of sustainable airports”.

claim’ approach, by which we mean decoupling the physical use of SAF in an aircraft in one location from the carbon reduction benefit that accrues to another party who purchases the SAF (or pays a premium for the benefit). (This is done already for electrical energy where electrons generated through a ‘green’ process are not the ones delivered through the grid to an end-user who pays for ‘green’ energy.) We recognise that there are arguments for and against this approach in the context of aviation fuel but perhaps, as a transition measure at least, it can reduce the barriers to SAF adoption.

And critically for smaller airports, if their airlines/passengers pay for SAF through such a scheme, the carbon benefits can be achieved with no local infrastructure impact at all.

Many aviation decarbonisation roadmaps also anticipate new technologies as a component of the solution. Could hydrogen be a potential for the longer term?

Arup has been working on future demand scenarios for hydrogen for aviation for a range of clients. Here we see two broad categories of aircraft: (a) retrofits of regional/commuter turboprops with hydrogen fuel cell electric power chains and (b) new, purpose-designed aircraft primarily using hydrogen-fuelled combustion to support larger payloads and ranges. Although there are still major technical, operational, and regulatory challenges to be overcome in this field, investments continue to be made across all these aspects in the UK and Europe, so planning for a potential hydrogen future remains prudent.

Airports and airlines have, largely, chosen battery electric Ground Support Equipment (GSE) for their decarbonisation strategy within the UK. But it is not without its own challenges (low utilisation or poor cold weather performance, for instance). However, Vauxhall has just announced that it is working to develop hydrogen charging hubs, with a partner, in the UK to support its fuel cell electric vehicles (FCEV) and provide a rapid hydrogen filling solution - under five minutes per vehicle. This is aimed at corporate fleet operators who require their own hydrogen refuelling stations and operate from depot to depot - highly relevant to airport-related operations. Could there still be scope for airports to develop as hydrogen hubs?

Given this complex and uncertain landscape, at Arup we work with aviation clients on integrated energy plans: conventional fuels, SAF, hydrogen, electric, and local generation, storage and distribution options. As energy costs for

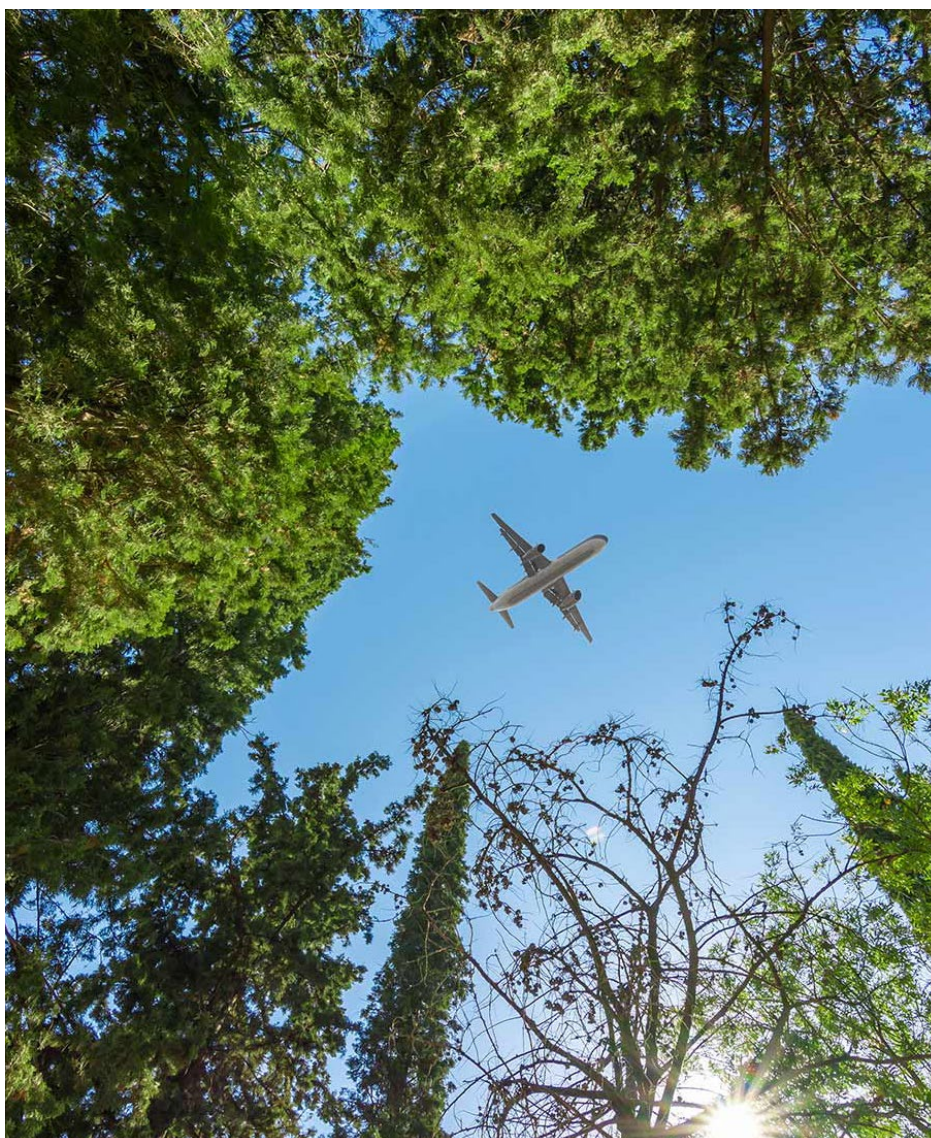
aviation are set to increase, not only is it sensible to work out a flexible masterplan to deal with the challenges and opportunities this brings, it is also of strategic importance to airport investors and owners.

There is no single silver-bullet solution. Developing an integrated energy plan within a flexible masterplan will require

collaboration across the system, including financiers, airport owners, operators, and airlines to name a few. Traditionally, an airport may have been seen as an infrastructure asset but now operators should look to their role as a hub from which to empower and influence the energy challenge in aviation. ■

Arup is a Corporate Partner of the Airport Operators Association.

“Many aviation decarbonisation roadmaps also anticipate new technologies as a component of the solution. Could hydrogen be a potential for the longer term?”



An aerial photograph of Islay Airport, showing a long runway and taxiway cutting through a green, grassy landscape. In the background, a large body of water stretches to the horizon under a cloudy sky. The text 'ISLAY' is written in large, bold, blue letters, and the quote '“A SMALL AIRPORT WITH A BIG FUTURE”' is written in large, bold, white letters below it.

ISLAY

“A SMALL AIRPORT WITH A BIG FUTURE”

Islay, located just off the west coast of Scotland, is the southernmost island of the Inner Hebrides and home to one of 11 airports managed by Highlands and Island Airports Limited (HIAL). We spoke to Islay Airport Manager, Niall Colthart to find out more about this remote island location and its role supporting lifeline services for the local community.



Niall, who has lived on the island since he was a young child, describes the airport as “providing vital connections to the mainland for the local population of around 3,300 people, enabling them to attend medical appointments, visit family and friends, attend events and more. There are also growing numbers of tourists coming to the island, keen to experience the local hospitality and scenery.”

“The airport is a vital cog in the daily life of the local community and our fantastic team here work tirelessly to ensure that passengers have the very best experience. It’s a beautiful place to work and I wouldn’t want to be anywhere else.” said Niall.

Loganair operates daily flights to Glasgow with flights to nearby Oban and Colonsay provided by Hebridean Airways. “In addition to these flights, we have a range of users at the airport including the general aviation community ranging from single engine aircraft to large business jets.”

Recent annual growth in passenger numbers is credited to two of the biggest commercial operations on the island – whisky distilleries and golf. Niall explains, “Currently there are nine distilleries on the island including world renowned brands such as Ardbeg, Laphroaig, Lagavulin and Bowmore with more in the pipeline to satisfy the increasing demand from overseas markets, which is great news for the airport.”

The site at Islay also has a long history, with the first airfield constructed in the 1930’s and it played an integral role during the Second World War.

“In 1940, Royal Air Force Port Ellen was built in tandem with a Coastal Command station at Bowmore and was utilised by Sunderland flying boats. Two years later, the first tarmac runway was constructed at Islay and was predominantly used by the Coastal Command and the RAF for training flights, convoy escort and maritime surveillance flights. During its peak, over 1,400 personnel were



*Niall Colthart, Manager,
Islay Airport*

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based at the aerodrome in Islay”.

Many remains of former buildings and barracks are still visible today with an official count revealing that there were over 260 of these buildings in the proximity of the airport, although many are now just foundations. Following World War II, scheduled flights resumed, and the airfield was operated by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). In 1984, the CAA put seven Scottish airports up for sale and the ownership of Islay Airport was transferred to HIAL following their incorporation in 1986.

HIAL, which is uniquely owned by the Scottish Ministers, is committed to investing in airports to ensure that they are operating as efficiently and effectively as possible to provide a service which meets the needs of local communities. Last year, Islay Airport benefitted from £5.5m of investment, “The resurfacing of both runways along with the relocation of the airfield ground lighting units, has helped to ensure the long-term future of the airport and the continuation of lifeline services and essential air connectivity.”

“The investment means that we have protected air services to the island

for years to come. The longevity of the commercial viability of the airport is vital to supporting the social and economic prosperity of the area so we are delighted to have benefitted from the work.”

As part of HIAL’s strategic aim to reduce its environmental impact, the team at Islay are part of a project run by NatureScot called Species on the Edge, to enhance habitat at the airport for adders. The Hebrides, have the most western population of adders in Europe and by creating sheltered areas they hope to improve conditions for successful hibernation.

The team are also working with the RSPB on a project to create a nesting habitat for Little Terns by creating stone and gravel areas on the edges of the airfield, which are located away from airport operations and where they won’t be disturbed.

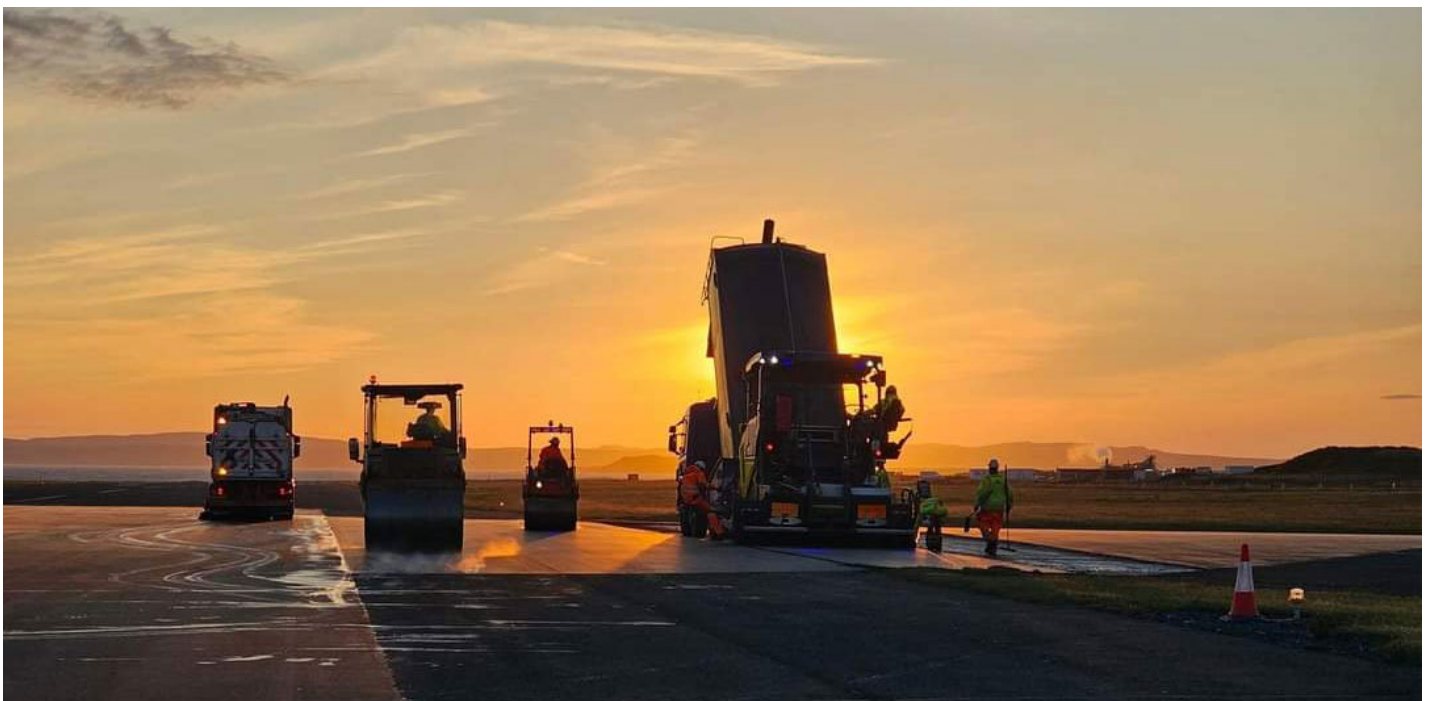
“Working on these projects, in partnership with other organisations, is a key element of HIAL’s Sustainability Strategy, helping to reduce the impact that the operations of the airport can potentially have on the local environment.

“Residents as well as visitors value

the island for its natural beauty, and this is what makes it so special, to the airport team.”

Looking to the future, Niall feels very positive for the airport with the anticipated growth in tourism, driven largely by the global interest in Islay, particularly in the whisky sector. “We are ideally placed to benefit from this opportunity and offer that friendly welcome for which the airport team are known”. ■

“Last year, Islay Airport benefitted from £5.5m of investment. The resurfacing of both runways along with the relocation of the airfield ground lighting units, has helped to ensure the long-term future of the airport and the continuation of lifeline services and essential air connectivity.”



PROPOSED NEW ROUTE TO DUBLIN WOULD TAKE CITY OF DERRY AIRPORT TO THE NEXT LEVEL SAYS AIRPORT'S MD

City of Derry Airport Managing Director, Steve Frazer, has told The Airport Operator he has “every confidence” that the airport will secure a new route to Dublin this year following positive conversations with the Irish Government.

Describing it as the single most significant change that could happen for the airport, he said “Dublin would be another level for us in what we could offer and offer the island of Ireland in terms of connectivity”. The airport is hoping to secure support for a service that would operate at least twice a day.

Frazer said that Ministers in the Government of the Republic of Ireland are currently assessing a detailed analysis by York Aviation suggesting that the impact on GDP of the new route would be over €46.5m per annum, split relatively evenly between County Donegal and Northern Ireland. Derry has

been without a link to Dublin since 2011. At that time two thirds of the passengers on the route to Dublin were from the Republic.

Meanwhile City of Derry Airport has been celebrating their latest success, a new Loganair route to London Heathrow which began in May last year. Frazer said that “a little airport like City of Derry having access to Heathrow would probably have been seen as a pipe dream a few years’ ago. It is significant for our region and the development of the region, delivering a huge step up in connectivity and the foreign direct investment potential for the region is huge”. He described the

Heathrow route as “going from strength to strength”, with a new type of passenger for the airport using it for its onward connectivity to 119 destinations in 56 countries, with, for example, 13 viable connections to New York every day. The frequency of the service will increase this summer to 20 times a week.

The airport is also working to increase its connections to regional airports around the UK, with Ryanair recently announcing a new twice-weekly service to Birmingham from April this year, adding to its existing four times a week service to Manchester. Frazer said that the airport is talking to Loganair about



the potential to move to a daily service this year on its route to Glasgow. Other UK destinations that Derry hopes to serve soon are Edinburgh, Liverpool and Newcastle.

For several years City of Derry Airport was without a summer sun offering, but it now offers holiday routes to Majorca and the Algarve. Majorca, in its third year, operates with a 92% load factor. After a break last year, an extended summer season of flights to the Algarve will begin in May this year. Frazer said that the airport will be seeking to grow both its summer sun offering and winter sports destinations, building on an existing winter ski programme to Verona for secondary school children.

The airport is today handling more flights than it ever had before the Covid pandemic and Frazer said that a combination of increased frequencies and new offerings should enable City of Derry to surpass its 2019 passenger numbers this year. Pre-Covid there were just over 200,000 passengers a year.

That total fell to just over 160,000 passengers during the pandemic but could increase this year to around 225,000.

The last 18 months has also seen substantial growth in the airport's corporate and private charter traffic, with non-scheduled services now accounting for over half of Derry's aircraft movements. The airport attributes part of this growth to high-end tourism from the United States, reflecting the growing popularity of the North West of Ireland's golf courses. The Open will be returning to the Royal Portrush Golf Club on Northern Ireland's Antrim coast next year.

As scheduled and non-scheduled passenger numbers grow, the airport will be seeking to maintain its reputation for customer service. That was underlined last year by two unsolicited "best airport in the UK awards", one based on online passenger reviews and the other on a Loganair survey that showed that its highest customer satisfaction levels came from passengers flying through City of Derry Airport.

Frazer believes that the airport could be even more successful with greater support from Northern Ireland's devolved government, now that has returned. He admits to looking "with green eyes" at

The last 18 months has also seen substantial growth in the airport's corporate and private charter traffic, with non-scheduled services now accounting for over half of Derry's aircraft movements.



the levels of support offered to regional airports in the Republic of Ireland by its Government, including support with safety, security and sustainability costs and zero Air Passenger Duty. He said he thought that an opportunity could exist with the devolved government to offer a similar type of programme to enable the airport to compete on a level playing field with other regional airports on the island of Ireland, noting that the North West of Ireland doesn't have the kind of viable road and rail alternatives available in much of the rest of the UK.

One area where City of Derry Airport is ahead of Government targets is its journey towards Net Zero. A sustainability priority for the airport in this year will be to try to find a cost-effective way of introducing solar energy. Frazer explained that it would be relatively easy to build a solar farm that could meet all the

airport's energy needs. However, a lot of that energy would be wasted without battery storage, which is simply not viable for an airport of Derry's size. He said the dilemma could be resolved if the Government

were to grant the airport an export licence that would enable it to sell excess electricity to the grid and to get it back at the times when it is needed. ■

A sustainability priority for the airport in this year will be to try to find a cost-effective way of introducing solar energy.

*Steve Frazer, Managing Director,
City of Derry Airport*



UK AIRPORTS NEED NOT FEAR THEIR CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES, BUT RECOGNISE THEM AS TRUSTED CRITICAL FRIENDS

That is the key message for airports from the Chairman of UKACCs, the liaison group which brings together 24 airport consultative committees to discuss matters of common interest and to share best practice and concerns.

Colin Flack OBE, who is also Chairman of Birmingham Airport's ACC, told The Airport Operator that he sees his role as "trying to make sure that people in general don't see ACCs as a hindrance, because we are not; at UKACCs what we are trying to do is to get stakeholders at every level to think a bit more about their ACCs and what they can get from them".

Reflecting on his experiences at Birmingham, he said "I think it comes down to good leadership. Birmingham is incredibly lucky

because Nick (Chief Executive, Nick Barton) is exceptionally good and genuinely values the ACC as a forum. Through the ACC and its 40+ members he and his team are able to consult with over 3.5m people and businesses. If we can help in some way through the AOA to build the profile and understanding of AACs and UKACCs, then that is a brilliant result for us and for everybody else". Flack said that "front and centre of everything that ACCs do is that role of critical friend. It epitomises what the ACC is there to do".

All consultative committees depend

on their airports to provide facilities and financial support, but Flack insisted that robust independent committee chairmen and women ensure that there is no question of "he who pays the piper calls the tune". He said there is no evidence that airport companies seek to put pressure on their ACC - "I don't think it is in an airport company's best interests to be seen to be manipulating their ACC. It would just be counter productive".

Paula Street, the UKACC's secretariat lead officer, added that "ACCs work really hard to make sure that,

whatever they do, they are open and transparent in their work to actually build that trust and confidence across a wide and diverse range of interests that the ACC isn't the mouthpiece of the airport".

Nevertheless, she emphasised that "it is really important that ACCs have a good relationship with their airports and are able to work with their airports to fulfil the critical friend role. They need that relationship, and they need to be kept informed of what the airport is doing, what it has got coming through in their planning and engage with the ACCs, consulting them on their vision and plans for the future, as well as being upfront about the issues and challenges that they are facing and how they are looking to address them. Use the ACCs as a sounding board to help shape the airport's thinking".

Flack agreed that it is "absolutely critical to build the high trust environment in which both sides feel safe, so that the airport company can talk about things that are commercially sensitive or sensitive in other ways. From the committee's point of view it is about bringing your experience to act as that critical friend. If you can achieve that, then that is what ACCs are all about".

He and Street were also keen to stress that airport consultative committees consider a much wider range of issues than the noise and flightpath issues on which many assume they focus, given their role in monitoring airports' noise management performance. They said that committee agendas are wide-ranging and often cover issues such as the passenger experience, surface access and transport provision, air quality, sustainability issues, skills availability, local procurement and community support ("giving back to the community, being a good neighbour").

Turning to the role at a national



*Colin Flack
OBE, Chairman,
Birmingham
Airport's ACC*

level of the liaison group itself, Street said that UKACCs is able to provide mentoring, support and guidance to ACCs on a whole range of matters through the sharing of experiences and best practice of other ACCs. UKACCs is not a lobby group, but "if there are issues of common concern, common importance across our membership, then UKACCs can provide that collective voice at a national level in the various forums that we are represented on at the Department for Transport, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Airspace Change Organising Group (ACOG)".

She gave the example of land use planning and noise management. There is a consensus among many airport stakeholders that land use planning and aviation noise management is currently the least effective measure of the ICAO Balanced Approach. She noted that, since detailed national planning guidance had been withdrawn several years' ago, planning authorities and developers no longer have clarity, making development planning difficult and major planning application processes uncertain, resulting in new housing being built close to airport runways and underneath flight paths.

*Paula Street,
UKACC
secretariat
lead officer*



Flack said "We are able to help corral support to say we have got to get something done. We have become more proactive over the last two or three years and as a consequence recognised as a sound source of advice and listened to more than ever before". He noted that the UKACCs has a monthly meeting with Department for Transport officials. "That is a very close, frank, candid debate that we have with them, which has gone from strength to strength. They trust us and likewise we trust them. There is a very solid relationship there and we have been able to shift the needle on a number of things".

The UKACCs currently has 24 airports in membership. Originally the criterion for joining it was that airports must have at least 600,000 passengers per year. That has now evolved to encompass both smaller airports of regional significance (like Exeter and Teesside) and civil airports with a specific number of fixed wing air traffic movements per year (taking in, for example, Farnborough). Street said "where there airports that meet these criteria but are not currently in membership we are engaging with them to see if we can get them on board". ■

LAND DEVELOPMENT, CARGO HANDLING AND SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES KEY TO THE LONG- TERM SUCCESS OF TEESSIDE AIRPORT

Teesside International Airport Managing Director, Phil Forster, has declared that summer leisure flights alone will not be enough to secure the airport's future.



*Phil Forster, Managing
Director, Teesside
International Airport*

He told The Airport Operator that, while passenger numbers last year were already well ahead of the airport's 2019 total, with Alicante and Palma de Mallorca among its top three destinations, the airport has a strong focus on growing non-aeronautical revenue.

Forster said, "It hasn't been easy saving a failing airport from a standing start, but slowly and surely we are creating an airport to be proud of once again". Asked how that was being achieved, he replied "We are having to think outside the box. We can't rely on thinking we can just be a leisure airport, a summer-only airport. We have got to think of other ways to bring additional revenue streams in. What we are doing a little bit differently is building on the foundations the airport has always had: the surface access and the infrastructure. We are now just trying to unlock the growth opportunities".

"The three areas of growth where we can see opportunities for bringing revenue in for this airport" he said "are real estate (i.e. having over 800 acres of land to develop), cargo and sustainability. We want to be the UK's first airport to be completely off the grid. We are really looking to diversify our revenue streams from a different perspective".

Forster emphasised that the airport has already done what it can to reduce costs by bringing security and ground-handling in-house and cross-training staff to perform multiple functions. That meant that to reduce losses further the airport's focus now is on increasing revenue. "We have a ten-year business plan" he said "and I am more than confident that we will achieve that. The last numbers we posted show that we are ahead of budget, and we have just got to ensure that we keep moving forward".

On land development, he pointed to the advantages of being in the UK's first and largest operational freeport. "Our £23m 1.5km link road to the South Side Business Park is now complete. That has got the potential to unlock just under 300 acres south of the runway. We have got the first speculative building up and we hope to announce the tenant very soon. North of the runway, Airbourne Colours, a world-leading company which paints aircraft from around the globe, has just been confirmed as the tenant for a major new hangar opening in September. Willis Lease Finance Corporation's plans for a £25m cutting edge aircraft maintenance facility have been officially approved and are set to bring up to 300 jobs. These mean that we will be the only airport in

"The three areas of growth where we can see opportunities for bringing revenue in for this airport are real estate, cargo and sustainability."

the UK that can offer both paint and maintenance, repair and overhaul facilities for Boeing and Airbus".

The airport's cargo handling operations opened in August 2022. Teesside Airport has regulated agent status to handle secure cargo as well as dangerous goods and firearms licences. As a border control post it is also able to handle perishable goods. It handles a large number of car parts for Nissan's manufacturing hub at nearby Sunderland. FedEx is based at the airport operating their road network, and discussions are all but complete with one of the world's leading cargo specialists to operate a four times weekly scheduled service into the airport.

On sustainability there have been two major announcements. SSE Energy Solutions will start work shortly on the construction of up to 3MW of solar generation to meet airport and local demand. Further phases could ultimately deliver 50MW of capacity, which could make it one of the UK's biggest solar projects, delivering enough green electricity to power more than 17,000 homes. Meanwhile, Florida-based Willis Lease has announced plans for a ground-breaking sustainable aviation fuel plant, in which the airport will be heavily involved, focused on developing and producing power-to-liquid SAF.

All these developments come on top of the progress that the airport





continues to make in building its passenger numbers, with 2023 the best year for passenger numbers since 2012. In 2019, pre-Covid, total passenger numbers were 148,000. By 2022 total passenger numbers were 172,750 (up 18% on 2019) and they increased further last year to 226,000. The forecast for 2024 is over 240,000.

Amsterdam Schiphol, serving more than 160 global destinations, remains the airport's top destination, with KLM having reintroduced its three-times daily service. Ryanair runs year-round flights to Alicante, increasing this winter to three times weekly, alongside summer services to Faro, Majorca and Corfu. TUI flies twice-weekly to Majorca and is introducing flights to Dalaman in Turkey this year. Balkan Holidays offers a summer service to Bourgas, Bulgaria.

Forster said that the airport puts a big focus on customer service and the team were delighted last year when aviation and travel expert judges named Teesside International Airport as UK and Irish Airport of the Year at the Travel Trade Gazette industry awards. He said "Our passengers have spent the

last couple of summers singing our praises and now we have been recognised by industry experts too. I want to thank the whole airport

team, without whose efforts and dedication this wouldn't have been possible". ■



"The airport puts a big focus on customer service and the team were delighted last year when aviation and travel expert judges named Teesside International Airport as UK and Irish Airport of the Year at the Travel Trade Gazette industry awards."



CONCERNS OVER GOVERNMENT SLOT REFORM PLANS

**AOA POLICY MANAGER, RUPINDER PAMME, REPORTS ON THE
DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT'S CONSULTATION**

Since the 1990s there has been little reform of the UK slot allocation process. With the UK exiting the EU, the Government decided to look at the issue with the launch of its consultation at the end of last year. AOA held two member sessions with the Department for Transport (DfT) to discuss the implications.

The DfT said that we “can now take a more tailored approach...” for the UK and that the proposals have been “designed to balance the interests of both airlines and airports, [and] have the potential to usher in heightened market competition, enable more innovation and encourage lower prices”.

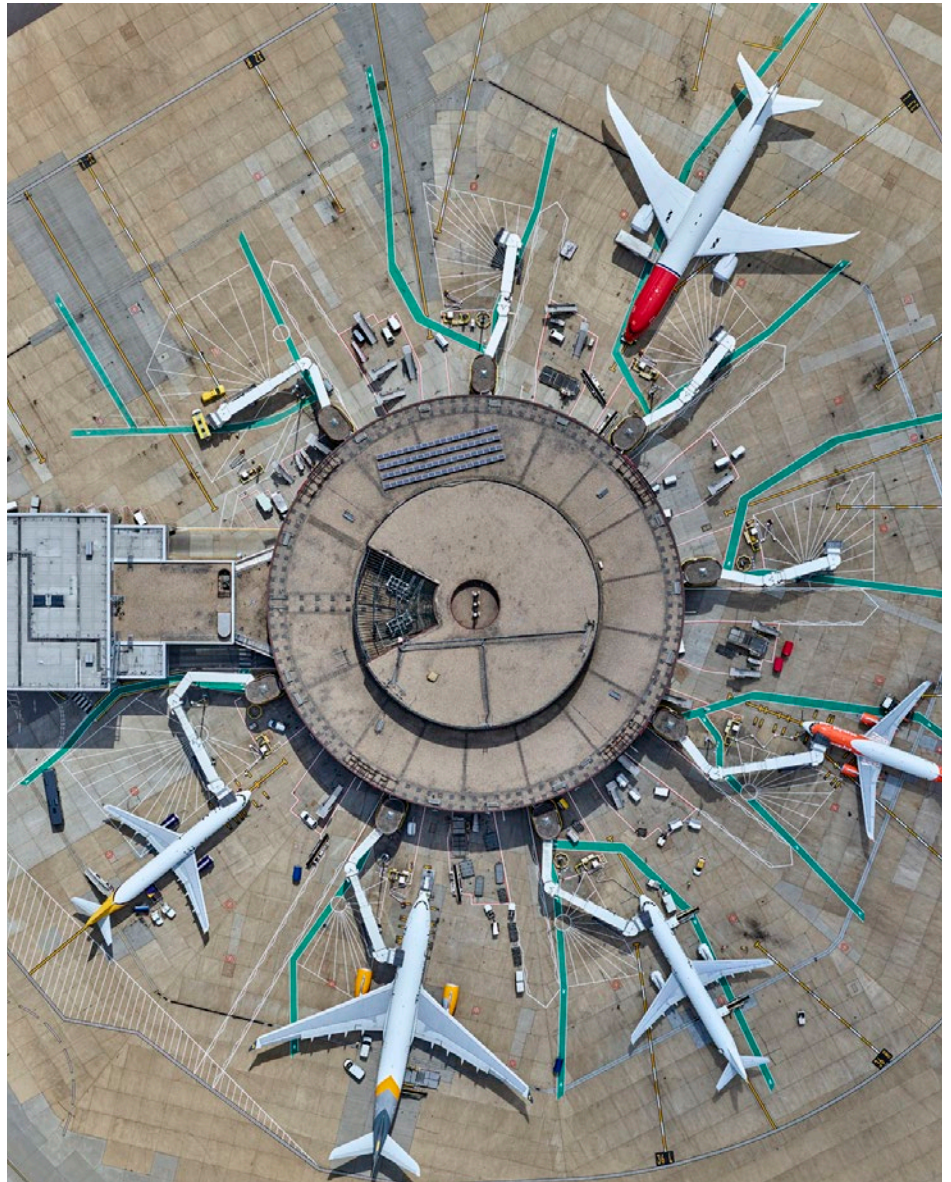
These proposals for reform will apply to level 3 slot coordinated airports (Heathrow, Gatwick, London City, Stansted, Luton, Manchester, Birmingham, and Bristol). However, this consultation will also be of interest to those who might become a slot coordinated airport in future, and those who have routes to slot coordinated airports. It is open to all airports to comment.

Many of the suggestions may be sensible improvements. But from our recent discussions with members, there have been increasing concerns emerging over some of the Government’s plans. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Changes to the coordination committees where airlines wish to have a stronger voice even though they usually form the largest representative;
- New powers for the Secretary of State for to allocate slots resulting from new capacity - here we need to understand what these powers will be and what the Government is going to do with them; and
- Changes of rules around the application of the slot usage ratio.

AOA will be preparing a submission outlining issues of common concern, with individual airports providing responses highlighting their specificities to issues pertaining to their airport.

Once we have gathered feedback, AOA will consider if a further roundtable with DfT will be required.



Slots reform is an opportunity to improve the efficiency of the UK aviation system and this consultation is a welcome step in that direction, but we need to ensure that airports’ views are taken on board throughout the entirety of this process. ■

*Rupinder Pamme, AOA
Policy Manager*

These proposals for reform will apply to level 3 slot coordinated airports (Heathrow, Gatwick, London City, Stansted, Luton, Manchester, Birmingham, and Bristol).





STRONG FOCUS ON THE OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES PRESENTED BY NEW TECHNOLOGIES AT OPERATIONS AND SAFETY CONFERENCE

The UK Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the Department for Transport and airports across the UK joined forces at the AOA's recent Airport Conference on Operations and Safety to present an informed update on new opportunities and challenges for UK airports.

Jon Round, the CAA's Head of Airspace, Air Traffic Management and Aerodromes, delivered the keynote address at the all-day conference held at the Renaissance London Heathrow Hotel. He said that the CAA's top priorities are to support airports in their responsibilities towards passengers and safety. The regulator is committed to prioritising customer experience, governance and effective communication. Round said that the CAA is also working towards supporting innovation in future flights and creating a regulatory framework for using electric hybrid aircraft at vertiports.

His remarks also highlighted the impact of climate change on airports. He emphasised that they need to have contingency plans to deal with flooding, snow and other extreme weather events. Ian Elston, Deputy Director, Airspace noise and engagement at the Department for Transport, also stressed the importance of climate adaptation plans for airports. He said that they need to be prepared to deal with a range of possible incidents, including pandemics, volcanic ash, fog, flooding, ice and snow.

The CAA's Principal Aerodrome Inspector, Neil Gray, provided an overview of emerging technologies and how innovations might challenge existing regulatory requirements for emergencies at aerodromes. He examined the issues connected to urban air mobility and the use of hydrogen and electricity to power aircraft, as well as the need to build capacity to produce Sustainable Aviation Fuels.

Simon Petts, Chief Fire Officer and Head of Aerodrome Emergency Planning at Gatwick Airport, focussed on the risks associated with emerging technologies and how airports would need to adapt to, for example, hydrogen's requirement for more space. He said that while aircraft accidents rarely happen due to fuel, when the fuel gets involved in an accident it can cause severe damage. Issues with lithium batteries



Another key theme at the conference was operational resilience and building future workforce competencies. Speakers from London City, Newcastle and Heathrow airports all emphasised the importance of investing in people.

would require particular attention, he said.

Martin Lown BEM said that land, terminals and airside would all be affected by a transition to electric aircraft and echoed Petts in emphasising the need for training in response to incidents involving lithium-ion batteries and electric vehicles.

Another key theme at the

conference was operational resilience and building future workforce competencies. Speakers from London City, Newcastle and Heathrow airports all emphasised the importance of investing in people. Ian Cowie, Director of Customer Operations at London City Airport, said that mental health and wellbeing are being prioritised. Richard Knight OBE, Chief Operating Officer at Newcastle International Airport, said that people are an airport's best

asset and empowering staff is key to effective incident management. Heathrow's Jason Knights described how the airport is investing in leadership skills and adapting to meet the expectations of Gen Z (people born between the mid 1990's and early 2000s).

A session on accessibility offered examples of best practice and case studies from Bristol, Gatwick and Liverpool John Lennon airports, as well as the regulator's perspective, an airline perspective from JET2 and a provider perspective from Wilson James. James Freemantle, Senior Manager, Consumer Policy and Enforcement at the CAA noted that airports have made a lot of progress on accessibility and are continuing to invest and make improvements.

Bristol's Richard Thomasson, Head of Customer Operations, said that demand for assistance from passengers with reduced mobility had increased by 43%. He stressed that passengers should receive the same level of service regardless of their disability. Similarly, Gatwick's Anna Ruth Cockerham, Accessibility Manager, said that disabled passengers wanted to have the same experience as others and should be at the centre of the conversation. JET2's Steve Wilson, Assisted Travel and Medical Manager, emphasised the need to understand that disability is complex and to differentiate between passengers with reduced mobility and other disabilities. Wilson James' Tom Giles, Business Improvement Director, described how new technologies are improving the quality of service and delivering better outcomes for the disabled.

Recognising that airport operations and safety depend on close collaboration between airport operators and third parties, the conference heard how this issue is managed at Edinburgh, Heathrow and London Biggin Hill airports. Edinburgh's Stephen Muir, Aviation Regulation and Compliance Manager, spoke about compliance monitoring and oversight management. Heathrow's Sharon Smith, Head of

Operational Safety Improvement, discussed measuring safety culture across an airport ecosystem. Biggin Hill's Ben Spiers, Head of Safety and Compliance, emphasised the importance of consultation and communication.

Shorter conference sessions included a presentation by Thales UK Chief Digital Officer, Justin Walker, a presentation on health and safety challenges and opportunities by Nicola Jaynes, HM Inspector at the Health and Safety Executive and an update on proposed amendments to ICAO's Annex 14 from the CAA's Aerodrome Policy Specialist, Mark Freeman and Ground Handling Policy Specialist, Mark Griffiths.

The conference concluded with a UK Airports Health and Safety Week activities showcase and a drinks reception and awards ceremony.

Post-conference feedback received by the AOA's Airport Regulation, Safety & Operations Manager, Adele Gammarano was universally positive, with comments including "a fantastic event", "a brilliant day", "a great day all round", "a great range of speakers", "eye-opening" "very insightful" and "extremely informative and enjoyable". Gammarano said she was grateful to the AOA's Corporate Partner, Thales, for sponsoring the event.

She said that the conference had highlighted the benefits that could be achieved by the AOA's Rescue and Fire Fighting Service and Health & Safety working groups collaborating

and sharing their experiences and best practices related to lithium-ion batteries. This is because these batteries are increasingly being used in small devices and work equipment in airports such as laptops, phones, handheld tools and electric scooters.

The AOA has therefore decided to organise forums where members of both groups can discuss risk awareness, prevention, mitigation, firefighting, recovery, waste management and health implications related to lithium-ion battery safety. During these forums members will have the opportunity to discuss and share their experiences and best practices in handling these types of batteries. The first forum was held on 8 February. **To find out more please contact adelegammarano@aoa.org.uk**.

Gammarano said she was grateful to all the people who attended the conference and participated as panellists or speakers and to the CAA for supporting many sessions. She said she was especially thankful to the Chairs of the AOA working groups – Ben Spiers, Stephen Muir, Catalina Peters, Simon Petts and Katie Bale – for their support in shaping the sessions, choosing relevant topics and helping with planning and delivery. She also thanked her AOA colleagues, Marko Saaret and Patricia Page, for their work behind the scenes to help organise the conference. ■

"I am grateful to all the people who attended the conference and participated as panellists or speakers and to the CAA for supporting many sessions."

Adele Gammarano, Airport Regulation, Safety & Operations Manager, AOA





Farnborough Airport

FARNBOROUGH, GEORGE BEST BELFAST CITY AND LONDON LUTON WIN HEALTH AND SAFETY AWARDS

Farnborough, George Best Belfast City and London Luton airports were the winners of the AOA's 2023 Health and Safety Week awards which recognised UK airports with the best approach to mental health and wellbeing.

The awards, presented at the AOA's Operations and Safety Conference, focussed on how airports are seeking to improve the mental health and wellbeing of staff, passengers and local communities.

Initiatives that were highlighted included appointing mental health first aiders, yoga, mental health dogs, men's talking groups and physiotherapy clinics, a Barbershop suicide prevention project, a stress survey and a cross-airport safety bus staffed by an occupational health team.

The winners were chosen by an independent panel of judges, comprising Neil Gray, Principal Aerodrome Inspector at the UK Civil Aviation Authority, Nicola Haynes, HM Inspector of Health and Safety at the Health and Safety Executive and Claire Neal, Head of Workplace Mental Health at Mental Health UK. The judges also gave highly commended certificates to Heathrow, Newcastle, Southampton and Teesside airports.

Neal said that Mental Health UK were delighted to join the judging panel and to speak about the importance of creating a mentally healthy culture at work at the conference. She described the nominations as impressive and said it was especially good to see senior leadership backing mental health initiatives and steps being taken to open up the conversation about mental health across all demographics.

Farnborough Airport used their Facebook page to express their pride in winning the Best Small

Airport award. The airport said that mental health and wellbeing is a key component of its safety strategy, which seeks to recognise the most important elements of workplace wellbeing and proactively identify how to improve and mitigate mental health and wellbeing risks.

George Best Belfast City Airport won the Best Medium Size Airport award. Chief Executive, Matthew Hall, said "We consistently ensure that the safety and wellbeing of our staff and passengers is central to our business, and it is fantastic news that we have been recognised with this award. Focus on health and safety is not just limited to Health and Safety Week. It's an ongoing commitment we uphold to deliver a comprehensive and beneficial programme of employee wellbeing initiatives that are designed to protect our staff, encourage progression and help them prosper".

London Luton Airport won the Best Large Airport award. Emma Meenan, the airport's Head of Health and Safety, said "Having good mental health is essential to our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing, affecting our ability to manage stress, relate to others and make healthy choices. This recognition from the AOA is testament to the fantastic work that our team has delivered to raise awareness and encourage open discussion around this hugely important area".

Adele Gammarano, the AOA's Airport Regulation, Safety & Operations Manager, said she wanted to thank all the airports who participated in the 2023 Health and Safety Week



George Best Belfast City Airport



London Luton Airport

for their effort, enthusiasm and commitment and for sharing their well-being initiatives. She also thanked AOA Silver Member, Leidos, for their sponsorship of the Week.

UK Airports Health and Safety Week 2024 will take place between 13 and 19 May. ■

The winners were chosen by an independent panel of judges, comprising Neil Gray, Principal Aerodrome Inspector at the UK Civil Aviation Authority, Nicola Haynes, HM Inspector of Health and Safety at the Health and Safety Executive and Claire Neal, Head of Workplace Mental Health at Mental Health UK.

AOA AND POLICE WELCOME NEW SCHEME DESIGNED TO FREEZE OUT ROGUE CAR PARKING OPERATORS

The Airport Operators Association and the police have welcomed a new scheme designed to discourage rogue parking operators from operating at UK airports.

The British Parking Association's Meet and Greet Parking Operator Scheme will be launched ahead of the summer season this year and aims to become the new standard trusted by consumers when booking Meet and Greet parking at airports.

Peter Campbell, Head of Public Affairs and Media at the AOA, said "Airports are keen to provide information and confidence to enable passengers to make informed decisions about the services they might wish to use in and around the terminal, so any measures that do this will be welcome. We are working with our airport members to ensure any schemes developed meet the requirements of the sector, while also satisfying the needs of the passenger".

Michael Brooke, Head of Operational Services at Police Crime Prevention Initiatives said "We are pleased that the BPA is working with its members, major airports and key stakeholders to deliver this new scheme, as there have been instances reported of unscrupulous operators damaging vehicles, racking up excess mileage and returning vehicles in filthy conditions. This scheme will hopefully improve the user experience by introducing measures aimed at tightening up the industry".

The BPA's Approved Meet and Greet Parking Operator Scheme will seek to ensure that airports have designated and clearly marked and signposted Meet and Greet drop-off and pick-up zones. Meet and Greet drivers will be qualified, professional and fully insured and will carry ID cards and wear uniforms. Vehicles will be safely

stored in an accredited car park and won't be driven any further than stated on the booking confirmation. Approved operators will be regularly assessed by auditors to maintain the highest standards.

Sara Fisher, BPA Head of Operations and Business Development, said "We are excited to be launching this new scheme which will be the only police supported nationwide accreditation of its type. For it to be successful, we want all UK airports to encourage Meet and Greet parking operators to join the scheme. Let's make rogue and unscrupulous Meet and Greet operators a thing of the past".

The BPA will be holding a meeting with airport operators at the Amex Stadium in Brighton on 29 February to provide more details on the scheme. ■



SHORTAGE OF TRAINED AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS LIKELY TO REMAIN AN ISSUE FOR YEARS TO COME

Nicole Park, Co-Chair of the AOA's Airspace and Air Traffic Services Working Group, predicts that recent and current shortages of air traffic controllers are unlikely to be fully resolved in the near term. Park leads the working group, together with Matt Wilshaw-Rhead, from Birmingham Airport.

She told The Airport Operator that the industry resource challenges are now widely understood, and a series of steps to resolve them are under way. “It has now become recognised as a problem for proactive resolution, the trouble is that we all know that it’s going to take a number of years. An early point of comfort in recovery is expected within two to three years, whilst we successfully navigate the immediate resourcing difficulties”.

Park, who is Head of Air Traffic Services at London Southend Airport, said that identified resource shortages were already emerging as an issue pre-pandemic. Then, during Covid trainees that were surplus to requirements found new careers away from the profession “so we were left with a drought period that had been exacerbated because both at a regional level and at NATS we are seeing a big retirement phase.”

“We are very much looking at how do we recover in the short term. Brexit has compounded issues as previously, under EASA licence, air traffic controllers (ATCOs) could move around in Europe. It was not easy, but it was possible. Now, to recruit an ATCO from abroad, the cheapest and quickest way to do this is by asking them to start all over again. They may be the most experienced ATCO in the Dubai tower coming to the UK but because they do not have a UK licence, UK ATC service leads will have to say ‘I am really sorry, I’m afraid I need you to do a 10 week basic course, followed by a 9 week rating course and in some cases up to three times over to cover aerodrome, radar and approach’ so taking almost an entire year to get them valid”.

Many regional airports have dealt with the issue by offering extremely attractive salary and retention packages. “In the last two years” she said “I have never

seen salary increases like it. Now ATCOs, if they are triple-rated, are commanding a six-figure salary easily though this is now starting to level off. Several airfields now also have a retention package for their existing team such as ‘stay for the next xx number of years and every year you will receive a retention bonus, just for staying and doing your job.’ Air Traffic service providers simply just do not want to lose the teams that they have.”

Since last October airports that have access to apprenticeship levy funding have been eligible for £27,000 of support for every air traffic control apprentice and both Birmingham and Southend airports have already taken advantage of this. Park said it was “fantastic that we as an industry can have that funding. There is still a lot of work to do, but now we have opened that door, there is a lot more that we can achieve. There are discussions around graduate schemes and around improving and enhancing so that it goes beyond that initial rating. It will be the vehicle that we use for the future, but it will change, develop, and grow.”

Resource issues apart, Park said that a big focus for the working group is airspace modernisation, which is a particular issue for airports in the South East, the Midlands, the West and Scotland. While there is a consensus that modernisation is essential to provide increased capacity and to reduce fuel burn, she said her biggest concern was how future airspace strategy implementation would be funded. The Department for Transport had provided funding at the outset, but she said the Government’s intentions on funding for the future remain unclear.

Airspace modernisation is one of many subjects where the working group consults closely with the Civil Aviation Authority. Park said, “We have a fantastic relationship with the CAA, departmental representatives from the CAA will regularly attend the meeting.” As an example, Stuart

Lindsey, the CAA’s Head of Airspace Modernisation, will be attending the group’s next meeting to update it on plans for a Single Design Entity to take responsibility for all airspace.

Park stressed the significant role that the working group plays, with support from the AOA’s Airport Regulation, Operations and Safety Manager, Adele Gammarano, in responding to CAA consultations. She said “I hope the CAA would agree that we are a great leader in providing them with excellent feedback. Certainly, Adele does a lot of hard work in making sure that the AOA and our member airfields provide good feedback to those consultations”.

The working group is also beginning to develop a closer relationship with the Department for Transport. “That is evolving” she said. “Certainly, the DfT and the AOA, through Adele have a good relationship and this is now evolving into the working groups. As the DfT have subject areas that they want to understand more, we see them participating in the AATS working group more than ever they would before.”

Gammarano said that the working group was pivotal in sharing key challenges related to the Air Traffic Control Officer workforce shortage. Several issues were being considered and conversations held, and the AOA would continue facilitating those conversations and working with the DfT and the CAA to address some of the key topics involved.

Looking ahead to the AOA’s Airport Conference on Airspace and Air Traffic on 25 April at the Renaissance Hotel at London Heathrow, Park said that a wide-ranging agenda is being finalised, with subjects to be covered including ATCO training, airspace modernisation, future of flight and cyber security. The conference will include speakers from the CAA, the DfT, Eurocontrol and UK Research and Innovation. Gammarano will be the point of contact for further information. ■

JET2.COM AND JET2HOLIDAYS ANNOUNCE BIGGEST EVER PROGRAMME FROM BIRMINGHAM AIRPORT

Birmingham Airport is midway through a £10m programme of aircraft stand upgrades to make its operation more efficient and reliable.

The project is making all the stands on the airport's South Terminal capable of accommodating Airbus 321 and Boeing 737 aircraft. The work involves reconfiguring existing aircraft parking areas to dimensions which suit both aircraft. In addition, the existing taxiway has been realigned with new lighting to allow the creation of more stands close to the terminal.

Work on the aircraft stands project is due for completion by this summer and is part of a £300m programme

of capital investment over the next decade to make the airport capable of serving 18m customers a year by 2033. Last year 11.5m passengers passed through the airport.

Other key elements of the programme include a £50m new security hall which is on course for completion in June and the installation of 12,000 solar panels on the airport's north east boundary which will generate 20% of Birmingham Airport's electricity needs.

This summer is expected to see significant growth at the airport, with EasyJet, Ryanair and Turkish Airlines among airlines offering



new routes or increased frequency. EasyJet, opening a new base at the airport next month, plans 16 new routes. Ryanair, which will be adding a seventh-based aircraft at Birmingham, has announced new routes to Derry, Paris and Tirana. Turkish Airlines will offer 18 flights a week to Istanbul from this summer, increasing frequency from two to three flights a day. ■

GATWICK NORTHERN RUNWAY PLANNING INQUIRY BEGINS

London Gatwick Airport's proposal to bring its Northern Runway into regular use will be examined at a Planning Inspectorate inquiry beginning later this month.

The first issues-based hearing on the case for the proposed development will be held on 29 February, followed by further hearings up to 6 March.

Those expected to take part in the hearings include the airport, local authorities, the CAA, NATS, the UK Health Security Agency, National Highways, Network Rail, train operating companies and groups

opposed to the proposal.

The airport recently consulted stakeholders on three minor changes to the proposal, which it said are designed "to reduce its environmental impact even further, while also providing additional design flexibility". The three changes relate to the North Terminal, a recycling enclosure and the surface water treatment works system.



Gatwick says that its proposal would create around 14,000 new jobs, and inject £1bn into the region's economy every year from increased tourism, trade, supply chain and other business opportunities. ■

BRISTOL AIRPORT SEES RECORD PASSENGERS IN 2023

Bristol Airport experienced a record number of passengers in 2023 with nearly 9.8m people using the airport, making it the busiest year in its history.

Declaring that it had recovered faster from the pandemic than any other major UK airport, it said it saw huge pent-up demand for holidays and travel to reunite with family and friends. The number of passengers was up over 10% last year compared to pre-pandemic levels in 2019.

This year will see major investment at the airport, with construction underway on a £60m public transport interchange and multi-storey car park. When complete in summer 2025, a glazed bridge

will link the new public transport and car drop-off area with the terminal, providing step-free access. The project is the airport's largest since the terminal was built over 20 years ago. Further investment this year will deliver new airport lounges and more retail space.

Graeme Gamble, Bristol Airport's Chief Operating Officer, said "Last year saw fantastic results. Our business partners, airlines and the airport have been able to create new jobs, building up our position as the area's largest private sector employer. Over 115 destinations will



be served from Bristol Airport in 2024. Over 8m people a year drive out of our region to fly from London airports. Our plan for growth in 2024 and beyond is to give as many of those people as possible the chance to fly local and reach their destination through Bristol Airport". ■

BOURNEMOUTH AIRPORT ON TRACK FOR A MILLION PASSENGERS AS RYANAIR ADDS DESTINATIONS

Bournemouth Airport expects to handle more than 1m passengers this year as Ryanair confirmed its 20th destination from the airport.

Managing Director, Steve Gill, said "Before the pandemic we saw 800,000 passengers. Having exceeded that in 2023, we are confident of seeing more than one million this year". The last time the airport hit that milestone was in 2008.

Ryanair has confirmed its 20th destination from the airport with twice-weekly flights to Nantes in Brittany from June this year. It also announced that it would start twice weekly flights to the beach destination of Agadir in Morocco

from 1 April and year-round flights to Lanzarote, which are new for 2024. The schedule is the airline's biggest ever from the airport. It increased the number of flights last year by 30% with the addition of a second aircraft based at the airport.

Tour operator TUI has also announced that it will add a second aircraft at Bournemouth this year, with an extra 60,000 seats available, a 33% increase on its 2023 schedule. TUI has 14 destinations from Bournemouth with increased frequency planned on many routes.

To cater for the expected passenger growth, the airport's owners, Regional and City Airports, are currently investing more than £5m

in new facilities, equipment, staff and training, ready for the new season. The investment includes an upgraded security search area with new scanning equipment, a new airport information desk, improved baggage screening, an extra baggage retrieval area in the arrivals terminal, more Border Force desks in arrivals and improved queuing systems in both departures and arrivals. ■



CARGO KEY TO GLASGOW PRESTWICK'S FUTURE AS IT REPORTS A PROFITABLE YEAR

Glasgow Prestwick Airport reported an operating profit of £2.1m last year, based on a diverse range of services, including its 24/7 cargo business.

The Scottish Government-owned airport announced its fourth consecutive year in profit, with passenger numbers substantially up on the previous year.

CEO, Ian Forgie, said he was pleased to confirm a new five-year agreement with Ryanair "and we look forward to working with them to grow passenger services". The airline has an aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul facility on the site

employing over 500 people.

Forgie said that "the Board is focussed on growing our cargo business and we will continue to invest in equipment and expand our facilities to meet demand, building on Prestwick's reputation for fast, efficient and well-connected 24/7 cargo services".

He said that the airport "continues to provide excellent service to military customers with most nations operating aircraft using our facilities, including the Royal Canadian Airforce, which recently celebrated the 80th anniversary of its

connection with Prestwick".

Forgie said that "the airport is well on its way to achieving its target of 50% carbon reduction by 2030, and we are also working on supporting the change to sustainable aviation fuel to establish the airport as a key supply point for SAF in Scotland". ■



RYANAIR TO FLY FROM NORWICH AIRPORT FOR THE FIRST TIME

Ryanair is to begin operations from Norwich Airport for the first time this summer with flights to Alicante, Faro and Malta.

Starting from 1 April Norwich will become Ryanair's 22nd UK airport with 12 flights per week. It expects to fly 60,000 passengers over the summer, to create over 60 new local jobs and to drive inbound tourism.

Richard Pace, Managing Director of Norwich Airport, said "This is fantastic news. Alicante, Faro and Malta are hugely popular destinations and with twice-weekly flights it means we can offer passengers even more great choice from their



local airport. We're delighted to be increasing connectivity for local communities and look forward to growing our partnership with Ryanair".

Jade Kirwan, Ryanair's Head of

Communication, said "We have worked productively with our new partners at Norwich Airport to agree terms which enable Ryanair to deliver this growth and investment for the region, and we look forward to further developing our partnership with Norwich Airport and welcoming our customers onboard our flights to and from Norwich. Our new Norwich operation will not only bring competitive fares and a wider selection of summer routes to our customers in Norwich and the wider Norfolk region, but will support important regional development through increased connectivity, inbound tourism, and local job creation". ■

CAA LAUNCHES NEW CONSULTATION ON VERTIPORT DESIGN AT EXISTING AERODROMES



The UK Civil Aviation Authority has launched a consultation on design proposals for vertiports at existing aerodromes, paving the way for vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) operations.

It comes after extensive engagement with vertiport developers, existing aerodromes and potential operators and aims to ensure that future operations at aerodromes looking to support these novel aircraft are safe, efficient, equitable and secure.

Electrically powered VTOL aircraft, often referred to as air taxis, are designed to land and take off like helicopters, but have the potential to provide more efficient and sustainable ways to travel between cities and airports.

The proposals acknowledge that existing aerodromes are already

equipped to handle aviation activities and are best placed to have the first design specifications for vertiports introduced. The CAA says that using existing infrastructure will give VTOL aircraft a place to operate from while the aviation industry becomes more familiar with their design, operations and performance.

Factors being consulted on look at placing additional safety requirements on existing aerodromes should they want to establish VTOL aircraft operations. These include the design of operating areas, obstacle limitation surfaces and visual aids and rescue and firefighting services.

Sophie O'Sullivan, Head of Future Safety and Innovation at the CAA, said "We are a committed partner to the Government's Future of Flight Programme and

enabling the introduction of innovative infrastructure is one of our key strategic objectives. This consultation is a big step towards enabling this new and innovative way of travelling to become part of our everyday life. UK aerodromes are vital in unlocking the future of aviation operations. By leveraging existing regulation, we're enabling future operators and aerodromes to develop their understanding and operational expertise, at the same time as growing our collective knowledge of the technology and operational scenarios to support this infrastructure".

The consultation closes on 15 March 2024. ■

LONDON SOUTHEND AIRPORT EXPECTING TO DOUBLE PASSENGER NUMBERS THIS YEAR

London Southend Airport's CEO, John Upton, has said that the airport expects to "at least double its number of passengers" in 2024.

His forecast is based on the airport operating its largest winter schedule in four years and airline announcements about new routes and increased frequencies for the summer.

Southend's winter schedule included flights to Alicante, Amsterdam, Geneva, Grenoble, Lapland and Paris. The summer schedule has been boosted by the announcement of a new route to Milan Bergamo, with six-times weekly Aeroitalia flights from

25 March and an increased service of easyJet flights to Malaga and Palma de Mallorca.

This year the airport will offer flights to 11 destinations in Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Switzerland.

Upton said "The momentum for new and returning flights from London Southend is on the up. The airport has ambitious plans for passenger growth and is ideally placed to serve not just Essex and eastern England, but also the UK's fastest growing population area to the east of London". ■



100% SAF-POWERED VIRGIN ATLANTIC FLIGHT FROM HEATHROW TO NEW YORK "A LANDMARK MOMENT".

The first transatlantic flight by a commercial airliner fully powered by sustainable jet fuel has been hailed as "a landmark moment" by NATS Sustainability Director, Ian Jopson.

Virgin Atlantic's Flight 100, a Boeing 787 using Rolls Royce Trent 1000 engines, flew from London Heathrow Airport to New York's JFK Airport using fuel made from tallow and other waste products.

Jopson said "This was a landmark moment, offering a glimpse into commercial long-haul flight powered by sustainable aviation fuel. This historic flight across the Atlantic showcased the results of a radical collaborative effort and NATS is proud

to have supported this achievement. The successful completion of Flight 100 showcased the feasibility of commercial aircraft flying on 100% SAF and was underscored by the collaborative efforts within the aviation community".

He described SAF as "a core element of the industry's decarbonisation pathway" set out in the UK Sustainable Aviation coalition's roadmap to Net Zero. Looking ahead he said that "the partnerships between new technologies, policy makers and dedicated professionals will continue to pave the way for greener skies, ensuring that the journey to Net Zero flying remains on track".

Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, said the flight was "a major milestone towards making air travel more environmentally friendly and decarbonising our skies". Transport Secretary, Mark Harper, who was one of those on board, said "This flight shows how we can decarbonise transport both now and in the future, cutting lifecycle emissions by 70% and inspiring the next generation of solutions".

Five commercial plants to produce SAF in the UK are due to be under construction by 2025. The fuel used on the Virgin flight was imported from the US and the EU. ■

SOUTHAMPTON AIRPORT APPOINTS NEW OPERATIONS DIRECTOR



Southampton Airport has announced the appointment of Gavin Williams as Operations Director.

Williams will take up the post on 26 February, replacing Mark Beveridge, who has acted as Interim Operations Director since last September. Beveridge will return to his role as Operations Director at Aberdeen International Airport.

Southampton's new Operations Director has spent five years at Manchester Airports Group, where he held operational roles at East Midlands, London Stansted and Manchester airports.

Ronald Leitch, Chief Operating Officer at AGS Airports (which owns Aberdeen, Glasgow and Southampton Airports) said "We are delighted to welcome Gavin to our leadership team. His extensive knowledge and expertise will undoubtedly strengthen our operational capabilities. Following the completion of the runway extension last year and a number of

subsequent route announcements, Gavin joins the airport at an exciting time, and I look forward to working with him".

Several new routes and service improvements have been announced following the completion of the 164-metre runway extension last August. EasyJet launched services to Glasgow and Belfast International airports in the autumn and has also announced plans to fly to Faro, Alicante and Palma this summer. KLM also recently announced that it will add a third daily service to Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport.

Williams said "I am really looking forward to joining the AGS Airports team and building on Southampton Airport's role as a gateway for growth for the Central South region. The opportunity to lead the fantastic team at Southampton Airport and to help build on the current positive momentum following the completion of the runway extension is one I am relishing. It is a hugely exciting time and 2024 is shaping up to be a big

year at the airport as we look to attract even more new routes and deliver further improvements to the customer experience". ■





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