

THE AIRPORT

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF AIRPORTSUK
SPRING 2026

OPERATOR

NEW CARDIFF AIRPORT
CEO sees opportunities
for growth

CITY OF DERRY
AIRPORT wins route
to Dublin

UK AVIATION
COMPETITIVENESS
report summary

GORDON DEWAR
leaving Edinburgh
Airport

**£33bn plans for a new runway
and terminals could be
operational within a decade**

HEATHROW CELEBRATES RECORD GROWTH

Airports
UK



**AIRPORTSUK IS PLEASED TO WORK
WITH ITS CORPORATE PARTNERS,
GOLD AND SILVER MEMBERS**

CORPORATE PARTNERS



GOLD MEMBERS



SILVER MEMBERS



THE AIRPORT OPERATOR

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF AIRPORTSUK

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Richard Holden MP

**Our airports are
gateways not only
to the world, but to
prosperity at home**

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KAREN DEE

INTRODUCTION TO THE AIRPORT OPERATOR



Hello and welcome to the spring issue of The Airport Operator magazine.

And what a great start to the year it has been for our sector. The latest CAA data have shown that passenger satisfaction levels are higher than ever, and the appetite for flying continues to grow. And it is now official, 2025 saw the greatest number of passenger journeys take place ever, with many airports reporting their own record numbers as well.

Of course, this is not the case for all airports in the UK, and AirportsUK is working hard to ensure the right fiscal, policy and regulatory conditions are provided to enable further growth back to, and above, the 2019 levels.

We are continually pushing government on the tax burdens placed on aviation, through business rates, air passenger duty, employee taxes, and others. And how the UK risks pricing itself out of consideration as a visitor destination through the cumulative effect of a lack of a VAT-free shopping regime, no arrivals duty-free, rising visa costs and visitor economy taxes.

All while airports face rising costs imposed through, for example, environmental remediation efforts, policing and border services, through sustainability and decarbonisation measures, and next generation security investment. We are highlighting the influence that all of these have on airports' ability to manage costs, to improve connectivity and our attractiveness as a destination for investment and tourism.

Ministers are being left in no doubt that increasing our costs and regulatory burdens could affect how airports can contribute to the government's economic growth mission. That is why, along with Airlines UK and Airlines4America, we commissioned WPI Strategy to analyse the impacts of these, plus other factors, on the cost of flying and on the UK's relative competitiveness against our global peers. There is a more detailed summary of the outcomes of this work elsewhere in this edition, which demonstrates why it forms the centrepiece of our argument that airports across the UK are ready to drive growth.

We already connect the country to hundreds of global

destinations, linking exporters and customers, universities and researchers, creative industries and audiences, and families to loved ones. Each airport around the country sits at the heart of a web of employment and enterprise that unlocks opportunity and investment. And through this, they can all help to address the regional productivity gap, ensuring prosperity is not confined to one corner of the country, through strengthened regional connectivity.

So, our message is let's get on and support all airports to grow sustainably and provide the frameworks that will empower their success. We had the opportunity to put this message directly to the aviation minister as he joined us for our annual dinner. We will also be able to make the point that successful and growing airports are compatible with our decarbonisation goals at our agenda-setting sustainability conference, taking place in May.

This issue, like all the previous ones, is full of news highlighting just what it takes to run successful airports. We are delighted that the shadow transport secretary, Richard Holden MP, has written for us on the Conservative party's approach to aviation policy and how it plans to hold the government's feet to the fire on our behalf. There are articles on Heathrow, Gatwick, Cardiff, City of Derry, and Campbeltown airports, showing how airports of all sizes benefit their communities and the country. We feature two of our non-airport members, Fujitsu and Terberg DTS, and how they are supporting operations through IT and air quality solutions. And finally, the CAA has written on the new ground handling regulations that are being brought in, while our European colleagues at ACI Europe have provided us with an update on the rollout of the EU Entry/Exit System.

These articles illustrate the sheer vibrancy of activity that is taking place at airports up and down the country and hopefully they will make those in power think about what more we could achieve and contribute as a sector if costs and burdens were reduced.

From all of us at AirportsUK, we hope you enjoy this issue of our magazine, and we hope that many of you enjoyed our annual dinner.

Karen Dee
Chief Executive

HEATHROW AIRPORT

HEATHROW CELEBRATES RECORD GROWTH AND PUNCTUALITY AS IT AWAITS KEY DECISIONS FROM THE CAA AND THE GOVERNMENT

Heathrow Airport's Chief Operating Officer, Javier Echave, has told *The Airport Operator* that 2025 was "the best year in our history", as passenger numbers for the year surpassed 84m for the first time ever and Heathrow became Europe's most punctual hub airport.

Echave said "2025 was our best year, but I am confident and I hope that 2026 is going to be even better". The airport would start work this year on a revamp to Terminal 4, which will include a new multi-storey car park and an upgraded check-in area, and a new dedicated baggage system for Terminal 2. He said that the right decisions by the UK Civil Aviation Authority and the Government this summer would unlock £33bn plans for a new third runway and terminals

to service demand that could be operational within a decade.

A decision by the CAA on how early costs could be recovered is imminent and over the summer it will decide on the long-term regulatory model which will determine if private investment will be forthcoming. At the same time the Department for Transport is expected to publish a draft Airports National Policy Statement, with Parliament being asked to decide on the final framework in the autumn.

Echave said "It is extremely welcome that the Government is recognising the importance of Heathrow expansion and of having a strong hub. We are the largest UK port. We enable one third of the exports of this country and at the end of the day unfortunately the future UK success is constrained because of the capacity constraints at Heathrow. At this stage we are talking about a privately financed programme and that will have to be funded. To be able to fund that

Javier
Echave

"2025 was our best year, but I am confident and I hope that 2026 is going to be even better". The airport will start work this year on a revamp to Terminal 4, which will include a new multi-storey car park and an upgraded check-in area, and a new dedicated baggage system for Terminal 2.

what we need is a clear regulatory framework to attract investment. At this stage we do not have that framework. We could double the size of Heathrow in the next 10 to 15 years, if we have the right regulation in place. We are ready to go. We are keen to go, but obviously the size of the programme requires that the CAA needs to make decisions at speed”.

He described the Government’s review of the Airports National Policy Statement as “the other key milestone that is really important. We believe that if both DfT and the CAA move at speed we for our part will do everything we can to deliver the Government’s timetable of securing planning permission by 2029”.

Looking back on 2025, Echave was keen to explain how Heathrow had been able to claim the crown as Europe’s most punctual hub airport – ahead of major competitors like Amsterdam Schiphol, Frankfurt, Madrid and Paris Charles de Gaulle – just three years after it had been named the worst hub for delays.

He said “the way we describe ‘the magic of Heathrow’ today is that the airport is part of a system. We have 400 different companies working at this airport. What passengers and airlines are seeking is seamless end-to-end integration. At the end of 2024 we managed to get the system back to the volumes that we had prior to the pandemic, but the level of service was not as good as we would like. That forced us to sit down with all the different main players across the airport, primarily our major carriers (British Airways, Virgin Atlantic and American Airlines), air traffic control and Heathrow itself to understand and deepen further our relationship in terms of how we can make the passenger experience better and be much more proactively aligned in terms of goals.

“We got to the next level in terms



“The magic of Heathrow today is that the airport is part of a system. We have 400 different companies working at this airport. What passengers and airlines are seeking is seamless end-to-end integration”.

Heathrow, with proposed third runway



of alignment and collaboration and then we created a plan that had different components – first of all, better technology, so NATS has done an amazing job in terms of the inception of its world-first software, Pairwise, using artificial intelligence to optimise flight plans, which reduced arrival delays by 80%. We also helped to remove some of the friction that we had in certain parts of the airfield. Our airlines also did an amazing job in terms of deploying technology in their plans and building more effective schedules”.

All of this together meant that for the first time we managed to move from being the worst-performing hub airport in 2022 to the best in 2025. Thanks to this practical alignment, collaboration and using technology to unlock the benefits for passengers, the system is working more effectively than before. It wasn't luck. It

was a story of collaboration and innovation, delivering real benefits for passengers and airlines alike and I'm incredibly proud of all we have achieved together”.

Echave also focussed on Heathrow's completion of its £1bn security technology upgrade in January, when it became the largest airport in the world to fully roll out next-generation CT security scanners. He said “it is transformational. I keep being stopped by passengers emphasising how much they love the change. This is another example of great investment at the service of the passengers. It has been a huge investment over many years. We have replaced 144 security lanes at Heathrow, more than the rest of the UK airports altogether. It is a great example of how technology can deliver better experiences for our customers and an important reminder that Heathrow has a very strong track

record in terms of delivering huge infrastructure programmes on time and under budget – Terminal 5, Terminal 2 and now this security transformation. This is a good indication to the country of how we will perform when expansion happens”.

Concluding the interview, Echave said he continues to be “extremely humbled by the unbelievably competent and caring team that we have here at Heathrow, and it is not just Heathrow Airport Ltd. It is our team, but also the airlines' teams, the ground handlers, immigration, Home Office and emergency response teams. We have an amazing 90,000 people working around the airport with a single mission – and that mission is making every journey better. This is how we thrive and this is what we will continue doing”. ■



ACI EUROPE

ACI EUROPE CALLS FOR URGENT ACTION TO PREVENT HUGE QUEUES AT EUROPE'S AIRPORTS THIS SUMMER

Director General, Olivier Jankovec, warns that "without urgent corrective measures, four-hour border control waits risk becoming the new reality at Europe's airports this summer"

Airports across Europe are sounding the alarm over the operational consequences of the EU's new Entry/Exit System (EES), as waiting times at Schengen borders rise sharply and further disruption becomes a real risk during the summer peak.

"We sent a letter to the European Commission last December to raise the mounting issues with the rollout and their impact on airports and their passengers," ACI EUROPE Director General Olivier Jankovec said. "But we were told there was no real problem with waiting times at the borders and that the system was working perfectly."

On the ground, airports report a very different reality.

The EES, based on a regulation



Olivier Jankovec

dating back to 2017, aims to combat organised crime and terrorism. Its objective is clear: better protect the external borders of the Schengen area. It introduces biometric registration – facial image and fingerprints – replacing the simple passport check with

a system based on real-time information sharing between a centralised database and border control authorities across Schengen.

Airports support these objectives, but they also depend entirely on the authorities responsible for border control to carry out the rollout. This means airport operators are on the front line of any issues arising with limited capacity to prevent or alleviate them.

The deployment began on 12 October 2025. It was initially applied to 10% of travellers, then 35% in January, in a limited number of border crossing points. The system is scheduled to cover 100% of non-Schengen travellers by 9 April 2026.

Since the start of the EES rollout on 12 October 2025, ACI EUROPE surveyed its members on a monthly basis to assess the impact of implementation. Before EES, the maximum waiting time at border control averaged up to 30 minutes. Since January, that figure has climbed to up to two hours – and in some cases much more.

With waiting times at this level, the consequences go beyond inconvenience: service quality deteriorates, passenger comfort suffers, and overcrowding creates potential safety and security risks. Operational impacts are already visible, particularly missed connections.

January and February typically represent the lowest traffic months, with around 95 million passengers per month across European airports. The real stress test lies ahead. In July and August, traffic volumes will almost double. By then, EES is expected to be applied to 100% of relevant passengers and across all border crossing points.

“We expect maximum waiting times to reach four hours, or even more,” Olivier Jankovec warns. Several factors are at play in this dire projection.

First, there are stability problems with the centralised system. Airports report outages and slowdowns. A major outage occurred last autumn. While the situation appears to be improving, reliability remains a concern in a system that depends entirely on real-time data exchange.

Second, there is a chronic issue that predates EES: understaffing among border control guards. The post-Covid recovery in traffic has been very strong, but staffing levels of border guards have not kept the same pace.

“This is a chronic problem that has become even more acute with EES,” Olivier Jankovec notes. The



additional biometric registration requirements make each passenger processing time longer. At the same time, there is a lack of flexibility in the organisation of shifts of border guards, limiting the ability to adapt quickly to peaks in demand, especially during early-morning and late-evening arrival peaks.

Third, technology on the ground is not delivering consistently. At many airports, the Self-Service Kiosks and Automated Border Control gates used to register passengers in EES and process their border crossing simply do not work. Where they do function, airports frequently observe reliability and maintenance issues.

In practical terms, this means that instead of accelerating processing, equipment failures often redirect passengers back to manual checks, further increasing queues.

Another missing piece is pre-registration. While the mobile application allowing travellers to pre-register their data has been developed, its deployment remains very limited. In fact, the only country that currently uses it is Sweden.

“We are calling for it to be deployed by all Schengen states,” the ACI EUROPE Director General says. Without a pre-registration option, every step of biometric enrolment must be completed

at the airport, adding time and complexity at the point of arrival.

For now, there is a temporary safeguard. At the end of the transition period on 9 April 2026, Schengen states may partially suspend the application of the EES for 90 days. After early July, the rules to suspend the system in case of significant operational hurdles remain unclear. ACI EUROPE is now working with the EU institutions to confirm a clear set of rules and allow for maximum flexibility.

Crucially, airports are asking for that flexibility to be extended until October – effectively covering the entire summer season. Airports support stronger border protection and more effective controls, but – together with their airline partners represented by A4E and IATA – they insist that the operational reality must be acknowledged.

With traffic set to surge and EES moving to full application, the combination of system instability, chronic understaffing, unreliable equipment and the absence of pre-registration tools risks causing severe congestion at Europe's borders, triggering a domino effect of negative consequences for passengers, airports and airlines.

Without urgent corrective measures, four-hour border control waits risk becoming the new reality at Europe's airports this summer. ■

EDINBURGH AIRPORT

GORDON DEWAR TO LEAVE EDINBURGH AIRPORT

Gordon Dewar has announced that he will step down as CEO of Edinburgh Airport after 14 years. It is expected that he will leave his role towards the end of this year following the search for his successor.

During his tenure at the airport passenger numbers grew by 85% from 9,195,061 in 2012 to 16,969,731 last year. In 2025 alone passenger numbers were up 7.5% on 2024, the largest year-on-year increase in the top ten UK airports.

Dewar said "It has been the highlight of my career to develop this fabulous business as part of an amazing, talented and committed team. I am immensely proud of our growth record not least because of what it means for my home city and for Scotland as a whole. Together we delivered better connectivity and market leading results through a business that knows its place at the heart of our community. In my remaining months I look forward to helping find my successor and to continue driving the momentum of this business that has the brightest of futures and limitless opportunities".

Stewart Wingate, Managing Director, UK Airports, VINCI Airports and Global Infrastructure Partners, said "Gordon is an extremely talented executive and has done a tremendous job at Edinburgh Airport over many years. He leaves

with the thanks and best wishes of the Board. His legacy of a strong team, exceptional growth and a

clear value driven strategy stands Edinburgh and its airport in good stead for the future". ■

Gordon Dewar



RICHARD HOLDEN MP

CONSERVATIVES SUPPORT AIRPORT EXPANSION WITH "SENSIBLE LOCAL MITIGATIONS"

Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, Richard Holden MP, says that "Our airports are gateways not only to the world, but to prosperity at home".

Our airports serve a myriad purposes. They are job creators and major employers. They move goods and people across the globe at speed. Here in the UK, we are fortunate to have some of the world's best airports, catalysing growth and opportunity not just in London, but across our nations and regions too.

They connect us to global markets, support tourism and trade, unlock inward investment and sustain hundreds of thousands of skilled jobs. In many communities, airports act as economic booster jets in their own right.

Yet, despite positive signals around expansion and investment, it remains a hugely challenging time for airports large and small, and indeed for the aviation sector as a whole.

Whether it is year-on-year rises in Air Passenger Duty, the looming

prospect of significant increases in business rates, even after attempts to mitigate the worst-case scenarios, or the cumulative weight of regulatory and cost pressures, my team and I are often left with the impression that Government sees airports primarily as a thing to tax, rather than as engines of opportunity.

Airports, like all businesses, are operating in an increasingly demanding environment. They must remain financially viable while managing high energy costs, face workforce pressures, regulatory obligations and the long-term investment requirements that modern infrastructure demands. That balancing act is becoming harder.

Since becoming Shadow Secretary of State for Transport, I have made it a priority to engage directly with the aviation sector. I have visited airports, including Heathrow and

"Airports, like all businesses, are operating in an increasingly demanding environment. They must remain financially viable while managing high energy costs, face workforce pressures, regulatory obligations and the long-term investment requirements that modern infrastructure demands. That balancing act is becoming harder".

A professional portrait of Richard Holden MP, a middle-aged man with short dark hair, smiling at the camera. He is wearing a dark blue suit jacket, a white dress shirt, and a dark blue tie with small red polka dots. The background is a plain, light grey.

Richard Holden MP

"Projects such as a third runway at Heathrow and a second runway at Gatwick have the potential to strengthen the UK's hub capacity and enhance global connectivity. The Conservatives will support expansion where it is accompanied by sensible local mitigations".

regional airports like Humberside, and I have seen first-hand both the resilience of the sector and the scale of the challenges it faces. That is why the policy environment matters so much.

We have to get past this notion of viewing airports simply as ATMs to pay for ever increasing Government spending. Every additional cost imposed on the sector ultimately feeds through to passengers, airlines, freight operators and the communities that rely on aviation connectivity. In a highly mobile global industry, the money will simply flow out to other nations who offer stability, predictability and a clear strategy for growth.

The UK's edge is by no means guaranteed. We must remain dynamic, nimble and attractive to the very investment needed to keep the sector strong and confident. That means ensuring that our tax regime, planning system and regulatory framework recognise aviation as an opportunity-creating sector.

Expansion and planning certainty are central to that. Projects such as a third runway at Heathrow and a second runway at Gatwick have the potential to strengthen the UK's hub

capacity and enhance global connectivity. The Conservatives will support expansion where it is accompanied by sensible local mitigations. But above all, investors and operators need clarity. Prolonged uncertainty, shifting timelines or opaque processes risk deterring the private capital required to deliver long-term infrastructure.

Regulation must remain proportionate and comprehensible, not some impregnable behemoth that constricts the space to grow and innovate. Our objective surely must be to have clear standards rooted in real-world operational experience, not compliance for compliance's sake.

I know the sector is committed to greener aviation, and that a considerable amount of capital has been invested in sustainable aviation. But policy in this space has to avoid the inadvertent trap of driving up costs without delivering commensurate benefits.

If compliance costs escalate too rapidly or unpredictably, the burden falls on passengers and risks weakening our airports' competitiveness relative to our European counterparts. Already, the likes of Spain are capitalising

on a low-tax environment to tempt long-haul operators, showing that we cannot afford to sit by the wayside.

Skills and workforce development are equally critical. Aviation depends on highly trained professionals, from air traffic controllers and engineers to security teams and ground operations staff. We want to see the Government make full use of the tools available to it to drive up pilot training and unlock the next generation of pilots. Without doubt, a strong pipeline of talent is mission-critical to sustaining growth and resilience right across the sector.

As Shadow Secretary of State, I am keen to hear directly from airport operators about where regulatory friction is most acute, where tax policy is constraining investment decisions, and what practical reforms would unlock confidence and capital.

Because when aviation thrives, Britain thrives. Our airports are gateways not only to the world, but to prosperity at home. With the right policy framework, they can continue to power economic growth for decades to come. ■





AIRPORT SUSTAINABILITY CONFERENCE

6-7 MAY 2026



AIRPORTSUK SUSTAINABILITY CONFERENCE

AGS AIRPORTS CHIEF EXECUTIVE, KAM JANDU, TO OPEN AIRPORTSUK SUSTAINABILITY CONFERENCE

Christopher Snelling, AirportsUK Policy Director and Rupinder Pamme, Senior Policy Manager preview May's conference in Glasgow

We are delighted that AirportsUK will hold its prestigious biannual Sustainability Conference on 6-7 May at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Glasgow.

This major event is expected to welcome over 100 attendees drawn from the UK's airport community, the supply chain and key stakeholders. It will also offer the opportunity to network over lunch, breaks, and a dinner on the first day and will cover the full range of sustainability issues, from carbon through local impacts, to social benefit to local communities

The conference will open with an address from the Chief Executive of AGS Airports, Kam Jandu, an update on the UK Civil Aviation Authority's sustainability agenda, followed by a focus on Sustainable Aviation Fuel reporting, a Greenhouse Gas removals session and a presentation from the Environment Agency on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). A policy update on noise and a presentation on surface access will also be included. The day will conclude with pre-dinner drinks and dinner.

On the second day we will explore social and environmental performance, where airports will highlight their contributions to the local community, along with a session on the work being done on air quality and the role of Natural England in relation to biodiversity net gain. The conference will conclude with our centrepiece panel session, which will examine decarbonisation collaboration with airport partners and the work airports are doing in this space.

Members contributed to the conference by proposing agenda topics via the Sustainability Working Group meeting on 21 January at the AirportsUK office – see right.

This conference will be a great



Rupinder Pamme

opportunity for members to learn, network and share expertise across our sector. To find out more about the conference and to book your place, please [click here](#).



Christopher Snelling

We look forward to seeing you in Glasgow! ■



Sustainability Working Group January meeting

Members received an update from the Department for Transport regarding the Government's thinking on a target for English airport decarbonisation, and the wider aviation decarbonisation strategy. There was a discussion regarding the misalignment between the Sustainable Aviation Fuel mandate scheme and the UK Emissions Trading Scheme documentation, issues relating to aircraft de-icing usage and presentations from Heathrow and MAG on Environmental Guidance and Sustainability Strategy. In addition, the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association delivered a presentation on electric vehicle charging at airports. Members received updates on air quality, PFAS, international catering waste and climate change adaptation.



PETER CAMPBELL

DROP-OFF CHARGES PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN MANAGING TRAFFIC AT AIRPORTS

Here Peter Campbell, AirportsUK's Head of Public Affairs & Media, picks through the thorny issue of drop-off charges and highlights the other side of the story.

There has been much criticism aimed at airports recently in the media for increasing the drop-off and car parking fees they charge. Yes, they are annoying, of course we the travelling public would rather not have to pay them, and no, in an ideal world it would be free for people to drive up to the front door of our terminals, take as long as they want to say goodbye to loved ones and wave them off.

This, however, is not the reality, and for anyone who has ever complained about the fees, it is important to understand the other side of the argument to all of this. More often than not, airports are left with little choice but to charge people to access their front door when it comes to traffic management in and around their sites.

The latest data suggest that just under half of the 85m passengers who journey to Heathrow every year do so via public transport. For Gatwick, this number is one-third of its 40m annual travellers, almost 20% for Manchester, around 40% for Glasgow, with other airports all likely to report similar proportions, depending on public transport options.

Imagine the gridlock on the roads around our airports if, as a result of discontinuing the policy of implementing drop-off charges, even a small proportion of these journeys switched back to car. Frankly, it is pretty incredible that, given the numbers of passengers our airports handle, they manage the traffic around their terminals as efficiently as they do.

The implication from those who complain about drop-off and parking charges is that they are happy for local communities around airports to bear the brunt of increased traffic. More gridlock, greater inconvenience, louder noise, higher air pollution, and all



Peter Campbell

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the other negatives associated with car use, are all prices worth paying so they can drive right up to the front door of the airport.

Often, these impacts are, however, not ones that local and national government are willing to accept on behalf of their communities. As such, airports are often subject to planning covenants and targets designed to get people out of their

cars and onto public transport. Demand management tools, like drop-off charges for what should be viewed as the premium option of dropping someone off right outside the terminal door, are one of those ways airport do this.

And what about all the things airports do with the money they raise from drop-off charges? They fund infrastructure investments to improve terminal facilities, make their operations more sustainable, increase public transport options, and support local communities through grants and funding schemes. They also help to keep other charges low, such as those airports raise from airlines, meaning air fares continue to be highly competitive and affordable for as many as possible.

Most airports with drop-off charges have free alternatives that people can choose. Airports also offer a huge range of options for those wishing to travel to their terminals. They also have schemes for blue badge holders and those with additional needs to ensure air travel is accessible as possible.

Information about all these options is easily and publicly available on individual airport websites and travellers are encouraged to consult these so they are aware of what they need to do. So yes, drop-off charges are annoying and an additional expense, but perhaps we really ought to ask what the alternative is, and how, if we didn't have them, would we protect and support both local communities and travellers alike? ■

CITY OF DERRY AIRPORT

FLIGHTS FROM CITY OF DERRY AIRPORT TO DUBLIN EXPECTED TO LAUNCH THIS AUTUMN

Twice-daily flights from City of Derry Airport to Dublin are expected to begin operating in October for the first time since 2011.



The airport's Managing Director, Steve Frazer, told The Airport Operator that the Irish Republic's Minister for Transport, Darragh O'Brien, has indicated that the Public Service Obligation flights will commence no later than 26 October. O'Brien has said that the PSO service from City of Derry would "improve access to Dublin and international travel for the North West of Ireland, supporting economic growth and tourism".

The Irish Department of Transport has recently concluded a consultation on its plans with both passengers and potential airline bidders and is expected to publish a tender for the service shortly, with tickets expected to go on sale in the summer.

Frazer said that the Irish Government's decision to fund the PSO route was a recognition of the key role that City of Derry Airport plays in serving County Donegal, whose border is just nine miles away, and the wider North West of Ireland. "Typically up to 40% of our passengers are from Donegal in the Republic and that is only going to strengthen with the Dublin route starting. As the only cross-border city region, we have a unique opportunity and improving connectivity is key to delivering on many of the region's growth ambitions".

He said that Dublin's backing for the PSO air route was also an acknowledgement of the poor condition of existing road links. "In terms of tourism around 80% of visitors to the island of Ireland come through Dublin and, although we have a world-class tourism offer, including the walled city, the Causeway coastal route and the Wild Atlantic Way, it is currently a four-hour coach trip from Dublin to get here. Equally the new air link will be a huge boost for the foreign direct investor potential for



Steve Frazer

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the North West of Ireland, which is fantastic”.

Looking back over the last three years, Frazer reflected on a striking run of good news for City of Derry Airport, which began in May 2023 with the launch of Loganair flights to Heathrow, subsidised by the Northern Ireland and UK governments, the first time that the airport has been connected to Heathrow. As Frazer put it, “for a wee airport like ours to have connectivity to one of the world’s best hubs is unusual and we are blessed to have that. Now three times daily, which is better than we ever had before, that hub connectivity has added 170+ destinations on through ticketing here from Derry. It has put us in the spotlight”.

Then in October 2024 came what Frazer described as “the biggest positive”, with the announcement that for the first time the Northern Ireland Government would take over the annual operating subsidy for the loss-making airport from Derry City and Strabane District Council, providing up to £3m per year to cover running costs for four years from 1 April 2025. He said “that is recognition that we are key infrastructure and the importance we play in the North West, particularly with our government here focused on addressing regional imbalance. It secures the immediate future of the airport and stops us looking over our shoulder every year wondering if the council rates process was going to deliver enough funding to keep the airport working”.

A month later EasyJet began flying from City of Derry Airport for the first time, starting with Liverpool and Edinburgh and then adding on Birmingham. In less than a year EasyJet had become the airport’s biggest carrier. “These routes have all started really well and Liverpool stands out” Frazer said,

adding that “We are working with the airline to encourage greater frequency on all the services. We want to build the momentum by getting the optimum days and times of the week”.

Last year, 220, 933 passengers passed through the airport, a 23% increase on 2024, described by Frazer as “a decent percentage growth from where we were, larger than most airports, albeit we have a lower starting point”. This year he is expecting to see at least another 15% growth to around 260,000 passengers, with the precise number largely dependent on exactly when the Dublin route starts. City of Derry’s routes include

flights for pilgrims to Medjugorje (Bosnia and Herzegovina) in April and May and to Lourdes (France) in May and school ski trips to Verona (Italy) in January and February.

Asked about the main issues currently affecting the airport, Frazer cites Air Passenger Duty and changes to the UK’s Emissions Trading Scheme. “The absolute biggest challenge for us” he said “is the long-standing imposition of APD. We have to compete here with an uneven playing field with Republic of Ireland airports, who enjoy zero APD. If you compare the total passenger numbers of Northern Ireland’s three airports since 2014, when the Republic went



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zero APD, the growth of Dublin, has been exponential compared to ours with the drift of airlines basing themselves there. We need a change in policy to address this".

On the emissions trading scheme, Frazer's concern relates to the current phasing out of free credits for aircraft operators, which, he says, amounts to "another tax on aviation, where the ETS scheme threatens to put another nail in the regional connectivity coffin. On top of APD, any other small tax could be enough to tip us in the wrong direction".

A UK Government consultation on the scheme has just closed and Frazer argued in response that "it is an unfair level of taxation to apply it 'one size fits all' and

we think there should be some consideration to aircraft size and the absolute vital nature of air connectivity when you live in an island where no other viable options exist".

Looking ahead, Frazer is confident that in the near future the airport will secure one or more European summer sunshine destinations. He said that "the demand across the North West of Ireland for summer sun is significant, particularly destinations like Malaga, Alicante, Palma, Faro and Tenerife. We are very hopeful we can agree a deal or deals which allows us to increase our activity, but not our losses. We are talking to the main carriers, and we are getting fairly close on a couple". ■

"The demand across the North West of Ireland for summer sun is significant, particularly destinations like Malaga, Alicante, Palma, Faro and Tenerife. We are very hopeful we can agree a deal or deals which allows us to increase our activity, but not our losses".



UK CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY

CAA TO PROVIDE MORE INFORMATION ON ITS PROPOSED NEW GROUND HANDLING REGULATION WITHIN WEEKS

The UK Civil Aviation Authority is aiming to publish a consultation response document on its plans to regulate ground handling at the end of this month.

Mark Griffiths, the CAA's Ground Handling Policy Specialist, told The Airport Operator that industry engagement workshops held last autumn in London, Edinburgh and Manchester had been well-attended, with "good conversations in the room and a good opportunity for people in the room to meet key people from across the CAA".

The CAA's consultation on the regulation closed at the end of January. One of the issues being consulted on is the length of the proposed transition period. The CAA expects its proposed regulation to be in force by



Mark Griffiths

November 2027 and has already indicated a preferred option for a three-year transition period,

leading to full implementation by November 2030.

Griffiths said that the objective of the new regulation would be to reduce the number of accidents and incidents, improving cooperation between airlines, aerodromes and ground handling safety providers and improving the quality of safety management systems within the providers.

He said that ground handling is one of the few remaining unregulated industry sectors and there is currently limited oversight by the CAA, even though ground handling is a significant and critical part of the growing aviation industry. Griffiths pointed to "a

noticeable increase in third-party ground handling companies, many with a mix of permanent, seasonal, and short-term airport workers". He said that "this, together with airport congestion, fast aircraft turnarounds and space constraints has led to ground operations on aircraft aprons becoming increasingly complex and potentially hazardous".

Ground handling is currently reflected in the CAA's top ten risks under "inappropriately managed contracted activities leading to a reduction in safety performance" and Griffiths said there had been "growing concern for years that this lack of safety regulation continues to result in injuries and deaths to airport workers and damage to aircraft and airport infrastructure". The CAA has assessed that the top six risks based on ground handling activity relate to load and balance errors (including incorrect stowage), anti-icing or de-icing, dangerous goods, aircraft refuelling, foreign object debris and the use of ground support equipment.

Griffiths said that aerodrome operators are already required to have oversight of third-party organisations and this would continue. He also observed that "many aerodromes already do superb work collaborating with all organisations working at their aerodromes".

He was also keen to stress that the CAA is always open to engagement and collaboration with industry and encouraged AirportsUK members to ask any questions that they might have about the proposed regulation. He pointed to the CAA's dedicated webpage – www.caa.co.uk/groundhandling – and dedicated email address (ground.handling@caa.co.uk), emphasising that "it is really important that we have that communication both ways and where we can give an answer or give guidance we obviously would". ■





CAMPBELTOWN AIRPORT

CAMPBELTOWN – AN AIRPORT WITH A MILITARY PAST AND A SPACE AGE FUTURE

Campbeltown Airport is located at Machrihanish, 3.5 miles west of Campbeltown, near the tip of the Kintyre peninsula in Argyll and Bute on the west coast of Scotland. At the height of operations the airport runway, at 3,049 m, was the longest in Scotland – a hangover from its days as RAF Machrihanish, which hosted UK military and NATO base operations until 1997. The current runway is 1,412m.

Two airfields known as Machrihanish, named for the local village, have existed; the first was operational during the First World War for the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Air Force. The site extended to 65 acres covered with timber and canvas Bessonneau hangars and Armstrong huts.

On 18 April 1933, the first scheduled flight in Scotland touched down at Campbeltown Airport, piloted by Johnny Rae and Jimmy Orrell for Midland & Scottish Air Ferries. The airfield transferred to civil use with scheduled flights to the nearby island of Islay, Renfrew – now Glasgow Airport, and Belfast.

The airfield was requisitioned by the Fleet Air Arm in 1940, and the following year became known as RNAS Machrihanish or HMS Landrail. A second airfield was constructed to the north-west of the original location. This opened on 15 June 1941 and was initially known as RNAS Strabane, later taking on the names of the original airfield. During the Second World War, the new airfield was used for training and as a base for squadrons disembarking from aircraft carriers, and it became one of the UK's top three busiest stations for operational anti-submarine patrols and convoy escort duties. The first airfield closed at the end of the war.

In the early 1950s, the airfield was used for several years as a satellite of HMS Sanderling, now Glasgow Airport, and, for a short period, it was used to train Fleet Air Arm pilots for the Korean War.

During the 1960s, the airfield was developed to become an RAF station and hosted the US Marine Corps, expanding the site and the four existing runways were replaced by a new 3,049m runway to allow Avro Vulcan bombers and other large aircraft to land. Ownership of the airfield passed

from the Admiralty to the Air Ministry in May 1963.

Due to its strategic location near the Irish Sea, it was a key part of efforts to protect the Firth of Clyde, as well as protection for the Royal Navy Trident missile submarines which, are still based at HMNB Clyde, more commonly known as

Faslane Naval Base.

During the next few decades, the airfield was used for a range of US military operations and hosted the Explosives Ordnance Disposal Group detachment who were part of the Atlantic Fleet. In March 1968, the Naval Aviation Weapons Facility Machrihanish was opened

Due to its strategic location near the Irish Sea, it was a key part of efforts to protect the Firth of Clyde, as well as protection for the Royal Navy Trident missile submarines which, are still based at HMNB Clyde, more commonly known as Faslane Naval Base.



to "receive, store, maintain, issue and tranship classified weapons in support of the US Navy and NATO operations".

In 1974, a detachment of US Marine Corps took over the role of security and then in the early 1980s, teams from the US Navy Seals arrived, with development taking place on the site again to accommodate their operations including a parachute drying tower, armoury and internal firing range. A separate building was also constructed to provide direct vehicle access from transport aircraft.

Following the end of the Cold War, US military forces here were scaled back, and the US Navy handed the airfield back to the Ministry of Defence on 30 June 1995, marking the end of its service as a NATO facility since 1960. It was then renamed MOD Machrihanish and was mothballed, occasionally used for military ground and air exercises.

An interesting fact was that from 1981 the airfield was certified as a potential emergency landing site for the Space Shuttle in case of the need for a mid-ocean abort of the flight.

With the airfield no longer required for the military, it was put up for sale and was purchased for £1 from the Ministry of Defence by Machrihanish Airbase Community Company (MACC) in May 2012. It now runs as a business park with support from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Scottish Government and Argyll and Bute Council. Parts of the site have been made available for commercial use with the aim of creating a sustainable future for the area.

In March 1996, the UK Civil Aviation Authority granted Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd (HIAL) an aerodrome licence for commercial flights, and it became known as Campbeltown Airport.



From the left – Crew Manager Jamie Graham, Firefighter Raymond Hosie, Airport Manager Lorna Bell, Firefighter Darren MacGilvray, Firefighter Campbell Anderson

"I love being back here working at the airport and being part of the local community. We are a close-knit team, working together to support the lifeline services as well as helping to provide connectivity to Scotland and further afield".

Lorna Bell

Scheduled flights to Glasgow are provided by Loganair from Campbeltown Airport, as well as supporting emergency and

medical flights for the local community. In 2021, a £4 million investment project to refurbish the runway took place. This protected

the future of the airport to support medical, lifeline and emergency services.

Lorna Bell, the current Airport Manager at Campbeltown, moved to the military base, at age 11 with her family, when her father was posted in as the Ground Radio Senior Non-Commissioned Officer. "I remember being part of the RAF community here with the hundreds of other military personnel and their families living and working there – it was an exciting time for me as a child."

After studying in Edinburgh, Lorna joined the RAF as a Flight Operations Officer. Throughout her career, she was stationed at Lossiemouth, Kinloss, Northern Ireland, Benson and Cyprus, supporting fast-jet, helicopter and maritime operations. She also deployed world-wide in support of operations in flight operations co-ordination roles. She retired as Squadron Leader in 2023 and returned to Campbeltown to take

up the role of Airport Manager for HIAL. "I love being back here working at the airport and being part of the local community. We are a close-knit team, working together to support the lifeline services as well as helping to provide connectivity to Scotland and further afield."

Looking forward, the MACC Business Park, which includes Campbeltown Airport, was recently shortlisted as one of two locations in the UK by the European Space Agency for the INVICTUS hypersonic test programme. This ground-breaking new programme aims to deliver hypersonic test capability not currently available in Europe with the potential to make spaceplanes possible.

"The area has great ambitions for the future and a strong community and business network working together to bring new companies and visitors to the area. I am proud to be part of these plans, not just as Airport Manager, but also

as a local person who loves this beautiful location." ■

Scheduled flights to Glasgow are provided by Loganair from Campbeltown Airport, as well as supporting emergency and medical flights for the local community. In 2021, a £4 million investment project to refurbish the runway took place. This protected the future of the airport to support medical, lifeline and emergency services.



AVIATION COMPETITIVENESS INDEX

AVIATION COMPETITIVENESS INDEX SHOWS WORK TO BE DONE

AirportsUK's Head of Public Affairs & Media, Peter Campbell, takes us through the findings of the recent competitiveness report.

Building on the work that AirportsUK has been doing lobbying government on airport business rates and the need to mitigate the average four-fold increase the sector was set to see from April 2026, and working with Airlines UK and Airlines4America, we recently commissioned WPI Strategy to look at wider aviation competitiveness.

This would examine and put values on many of the other additional burdens being placed on air travel, from air passenger duty and Electronic Travel Authorisations to higher policing and other rescue service costs and business rates; costs associated with Sustainable Aviation Fuel and decarbonisation, adoption to higher National Insurance Contributions and skills shortages; and the lack of a VAT-free shopping regime and arrivals duty-free, to costs of electricity and construction.

WPI found that the UK aviation sector is currently competitive: a hard-won position that should not



Peter Campbell

be taken for granted. Airports and airlines already (often) operate on thin margins amid a high and rising cost-base.

However, according to the analysis, additional charges imposed on airlines, airports, and passengers will increase the cost of travel,

hurt demand, and have negative macroeconomic consequences. This further pressure threatens both the industry's stability and the UK's hard-earned competitiveness.

The challenge with the analysis was to find a way to demonstrate the cost impacts of all this in a way that made sense to people, while also showing how it would affect the wider economic prospects.

To do this, WPI took four illustrative routes from the UK – to New York, Cancun, Amsterdam and Antalya – and analysed what the cost impact on a ticket price would be if these costs were passed along to consumers. It is important to note that the research does not say this will happen and acknowledges that there will be a host of ways airlines and airports absorb these costs, but it was felt important to show the scale of the challenges aviation faced on this point.

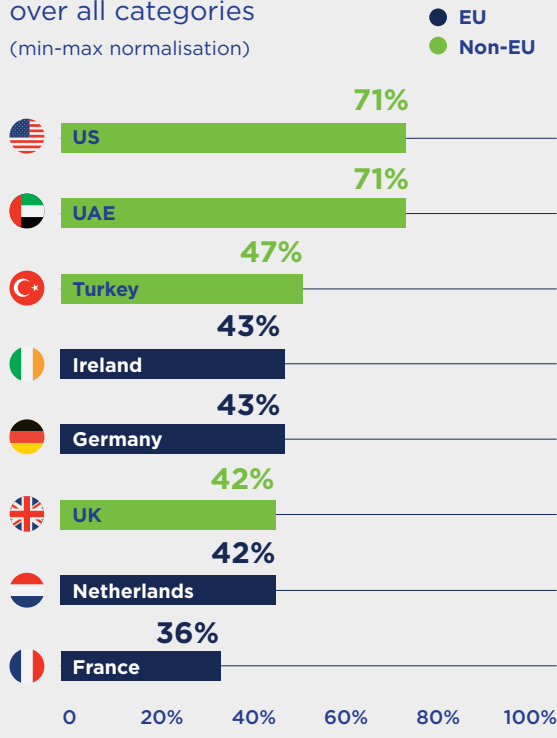
These routes were chosen for their ability to represent most of the major reasons for flying – long haul, medium and short haul; business

UK AVIATION COMPETITIVENESS INDEX

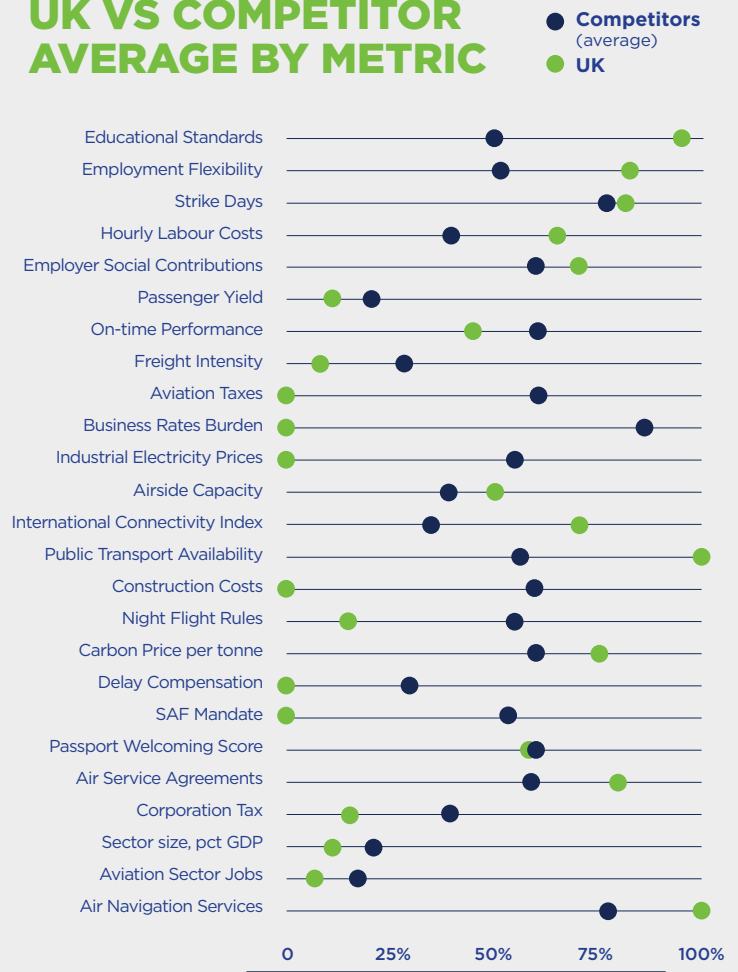
THE OVERALL RANKINGS

Airport and Airlines Index

Composite score, averaged over all categories
(min-max normalisation)



UK VS COMPETITOR AVERAGE BY METRIC



and leisure; new, emerging markets and older more established routes.

The analysis found that while the UK aviation sector has maintained its competitiveness compared to European counterparts, it is precarious in the face of continued rising costs. In our illustrative scenario, overall ticket prices could rise by an average of 27% between now and 2031 as airports and airlines exhaust their ability to absorb new burdens.

Without these additional costs the wider economy would benefit to the tune of 29% more growth in leisure travel and 8% more business travel. This would equate to £4.3bn and £500m more being

spent in the economy by foreign leisure and business travellers, a £3.5bn increase in exports and a £1.4bn increase in foreign direct investment.

These additional passengers would also spend more in the wider economy, supporting under-pressure industries that benefit from inbound air travel. Hotels would stand to gain £2.2bn per annum in additional spend, while the food and drink industries would benefit by around £1.4bn per annum.

Taking the work further, WPI Strategy developed a cross-country Aviation Competitiveness Index, benchmarking how national

The challenge with the analysis was to find a way to demonstrate the cost impacts of all this in a way that made sense to people, while also showing how it would affect the wider economic prospects.

policy, cost structures, and operational conditions shape the performance of airlines and airports. Building on analysis of the UK aviation sector's present and future cost base pressures, this index provides a structured

comparison of how the UK performs against global peers.

Taking the US, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the UAE, Turkey and the Republic of Ireland, the index is designed to inform long-term policy planning by highlighting key levers that shape competitiveness. Similarly to factors that influenced the route choice, these countries were chosen for the spread of European and international, developed and developing, short, medium and long haul, and business and leisure markets.

The results indicate that the UK currently ranks six out of eight, performing reasonably well among the European group but lagging behind non-EU competitors. This is particularly the case with the US and the UAE, where greater regulatory flexibility, lower operating costs and targeted state support help aviation more.

AirportsUK is going to be working hard to mobilise supportive organisations and individuals on this in the coming months, as well as bringing members along with us. We can then ensure that our aviation sector moves up the competitiveness index to the benefit of everyone in the UK.

The UK remains strong in areas like skills, labour market efficiency, connectivity and border efficiency; however, these are offset by the highest aviation taxes in the peer group, including punitive business rates and air passenger duty. Indeed, the UK is bucking the

global trend by increasing taxes on aviation while countries like Germany and Sweden are reducing or abolishing theirs.

There is an opportunity here, however. With support from decision-makers and stakeholders we can make changes in areas like planning, tax, the regulatory landscape, and infrastructure that will leave aviation in a much better place. This will bring significant economic benefits that will boost not just airlines and airports, but the tourism, retail, leisure and hospitality sectors to the tune of billions per year.

AirportsUK is going to be working hard to mobilise supportive organisations and individuals on this in the coming months, as well as bringing members along with us. We can then ensure that our aviation sector moves up the competitiveness index to the benefit of everyone in the UK. ■



VICTORIA MACRAE JOINS THE AIRPORTSUK TEAM FROM BRISTOL AIRPORT

Victoria MacRae has joined the AirportsUK team as Head of Regulations, Operations and Compliance after three years in health and safety roles at Bristol Airport.

She told The Airport Operator that she is looking forward to working on preparations for this year's UKAirports Health and Safety Week, which will run from 11 to 15 May, and on the AirportsUK Operations Conference, which will take place at the Hilton Hotel in Bournemouth from 1 to 2 July.

MacRae, who succeeds Adele Gammarano, said one of her objectives would be to try to ensure that every meeting of AirportsUK working groups in which she will be involved would add real value for the members who participate. She also hopes to emulate the "grace and collaboration" displayed by Gammarano that she had observed during working group meetings that she had attended while at Bristol Airport.

Asked about her first impression on joining AirportsUK, she said the team had been "brilliant and supportive, absolutely lovely people and that was my first impression. I could not have been made to feel more welcome by every single person here. Nothing is too much trouble; no question is a silly question; they have all been great".

She also paid tribute to Sarah Kerr, Bristol Airport's Head of Health and Safety, who had introduced a safety



Victoria MacRae

The team had been "brilliant and supportive, absolutely lovely people and that was my first impression. I could not have been made to feel more welcome by every single person here. Nothing is too much trouble; no question is a silly question; they have all been great".

commitment emphasising that 'everybody's safety is our concern', including staff, passengers, business partners, contractors and stakeholders. "Everyone deserves to go home safe and well at the end of the day. That was Sarah's safety commitment and that was what we worked to, that was really important. As Sarah points out, when you do safety, it is because you care".

Prior to joining Bristol Airport MacRae worked at Network Rail and in the Church of England. At Network Rail she worked initially in corporate affairs and then in administration and resources, which included involvement in staff safety, working on recruitment, rostering and safety of signallers – "my first taste of safety boots out on the ballast". In the Church of England she worked on facilities management and health and safety. "That was absolutely brilliant" she said. "It was like working in an episode of The Vicar of Dibley and I think that is probably where quite a lot of my management style has come from. On occasion trying to get things done there could be a challenge, and hopefully that helped me to develop some Adele-style grace and collaboration". ■

CARDIFF AIRPORT

NEW CHIEF EXECUTIVE AT CARDIFF AIRPORT SEES OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFITABLE GROWTH

Jon Bridge, who joined Cardiff Airport as Chief Executive in November, says that his first impression of the airport is one of "opportunity". He told *The Airport Operator* "We have ambitious plans at Cardiff Airport. It is an exciting time. I am pulling together a strategic plan and longer-term vision for the airport and clearly my main aim is to turn it into a profitable business in the years ahead".

Bridge said that he has received a warm welcome from the team at the airport and has been impressed by their focus on the customer experience. "I think that when you come into a business like this with a fresh perspective there are always going to be some opportunities to improve the business" he said "and I would summarise my first impressions in one word and that word would be 'opportunity', through growth in passenger numbers, route development, cargo and freight and looking at alternative sources of income".

Formerly CEO of the Welsh brewery, SA Brain & Co, Bridge

said that he had specialised in his early career in HR "so I have a keen instinct for supporting and leading people", while in the last decade his experience had been more operational. "I think there are similarities for leading any business" he said. "The commonality comes from ensuring that you are putting the foundations in place to grow the business commercially and profitably, and leading the team to achieve that vision".

Bridge said "I like to think that I lead authentically and with clear purpose. My style is very much to listen first and then to facilitate with openness and honesty any

changes that need to be made to move the business forward". He added that "where businesses are going through some change and transition it is really important to remain calm and create a sense of confidence and purpose. The key thing for me is investing time in building relationships for the longer term, both internally and externally, that will be critical to the success of the business".

He has inherited a business where passenger numbers are growing again post-Covid. Last year passenger numbers totalled just over 960,000, a 9% increase on 2024, and he predicted that "we are going to hit the major



Jon Bridge

"Where businesses are going through some change and transition it is really important to remain calm and create a sense of confidence and purpose. The key thing for me is investing time in building relationships for the longer term, both internally and externally, that will be critical to the success of the business".

milestone of over one million passengers in early 2026". Two key airline contributors to both last year's growth and the growth expected this year are TUI and Ryanair. With TUI's additional fourth-based aircraft, there are over 259,000 seats on sale for the summer 2026 season, which is 52,000 more seats than summer 2025. Ryanair is increasing its Dublin service to daily flights.

Bridge also pointed to WestJet's announcement of a new direct route to Toronto from May as "another major milestone for the airport, our first trans-Atlantic route for 18 years. So we are incredibly proud that we have been able to land that". The route will provide the only direct air service to Canada from Wales, the South West of England and the Midlands and Bridge said he expects that it will boost tourism and support jobs in Wales and the wider UK economy.

Noting that Cardiff Airport currently has 38 direct routes, he said it will continue to target new destinations in Europe, the Middle East and North America. "The message from me is very clear: we are open for business, and we will look to establish global routes, as we genuinely want to

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improve the choice of destinations for our customers, but I think, more importantly, wherever that is commercially viable. I am keen

for us to grow numbers in terms of our current routes and have a very open mind as to where we can target across the world".



Rebecca Evans MS, Welsh Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Planning, with, on the right, Jon Bridge, the new CEO of Cardiff Airport, with the Cardiff Devils, a Welsh professional ice hockey team in the centre.



Turning to non-passenger revenue sources, notably freight, he highlighted the airport's 24/7 operational capability and the fact that the airport's approved cargo handler, Swissport, has recently invested a significant amount in cargo handling infrastructure. Bridge said, "we are actively exploring future opportunities within that partnership and also separately to drive cargo into the airport".

British Airways is also continuing to invest in its Cardiff Airport maintenance centre and Bridge said "obviously we maintain a strong working relationship with BA. It is a major employer in the area and what we are trying to do is work with local colleges and universities with the aim to support job creation in the local economy further and BA will play a big part



in that. It remains a key part of our critical infrastructure at the airport".

Bridge is also looking forward to joining the Board of AirportsUK. He said "I am incredibly excited to be a part of that. Clearly for me, coming into the industry from outside, it is going to be important for me to understand the dynamics, but also then to build relationships with other CEOs around the country. No doubt at my first board meeting I will be doing a lot more listening than talking, but I think it is going to add real value for the Cardiff Airport brand and clearly signal that we are open for business and actively engaged with partners across the UK aviation sector". ■

With TUI's additional fourth-based aircraft, there are over 259,000 seats on sale for the summer 2026 season, which is 52,000 more seats than summer 2025. Ryanair is increasing its Dublin service to daily flights.





FUJITSU

THE SENTIENT AIRPORT: SOLVING THE PARADOX OF GROWTH IN A ZERO-EMISSION ERA

Fujitsu's Simon Body reflects on challenges facing UK airports

The global aviation sector has reached a defining inflection point. For decades, the primary lever for airport growth was physical expansion: more concrete, more gates, and more runways. However, as we approach the mid-2020s, that model has hit a wall of uncompromising new realities. In the UK and Europe, airport executives are grappling with a paradox. Passenger demand is rebounding toward record highs, yet the "licence to grow" is increasingly tethered to stringent environmental mandates—such as the UK's 'Jet Zero' strategy—and a chronic, systemic labour shortage.

In this environment, physical scale is no longer the competitive moat it once was. The new frontier of value creation is Sentience.

EXECUTIVE PRIMER: WHAT IS A "SENTIENT" SYSTEM?

For the non-technical leader, AI is best understood not as a standalone tool, but as the "brain" of a digital nervous system. To achieve sentience, an airport integrates three distinct layers:

1. The Sensory Network (IoT):

Thousands of sensors (cameras, LiDAR, temperature gauges) act as the eyes and ears of the campus, reporting exactly what is happening now.



Simon Body

2. The Digital Twin: A high-fidelity virtual map that mirrors the physical airport. If the airport is

the body, the Digital Twin is the "mental model" the brain uses to simulate different actions.

3. The AI Brain: Unlike traditional software that follows rigid "if/then" rules, AI learns from patterns. It takes the sensory data, looks at the Digital Twin, and makes a prediction. It doesn't just see a queue; it predicts the queue will be 20 minutes long in one hour and automatically reallocates staff to prevent it.

THE STRATEGIC SHIFT: FROM INFRASTRUCTURE TO ORGANISM

The Sentient Airport represents a shift from reactive management to a self-optimising ecosystem.

Traditionally, airport operations have been a “system of silos.” Ground handling, security, and retail operate on independent data streams. A Sentient Airport replaces this with a **Data Fabric**, enabling the “brain” to see how a gate delay affects retail spending in Terminal 2 and to adjust both in real time to protect the bottom line.

SOLVING THE OPERATIONAL PARADOX: EFFICIENCY AND REVENUE

1. The Frictionless Passenger Journey

By 2035, the vision is a journey where your biometrics serve as your universal passport. Sentient systems use predictive flow analytics to eliminate friction.

- **Business Impact:** Reducing friction at security through “walk-through” screening directly increases dwell time. Executives can expect efficiency gains of 20–50% by moving passengers to the “high-value” retail zones faster.

2. Autonomous and Predictive Logistics

Airside operations transition to “military precision.” AI-orchestrated autonomous baggage tugs and

robotic cleaning crews ensure that aircraft turnaround is optimised to the second.

- **Business Impact:** Sentient cargo portals balance high security with maximum throughput, potentially boosting freight capacity by over 20,000 tonnes.

ADVANCING SAFETY THROUGH SENTIENT ORCHESTRATION

Nowhere is sentience more critical than in high-velocity environments like baggage handling and freight.

- **Proactive Neutralisation:** The transition to a sentient model replaces traditional surveillance with Integrated AI Fusion. By combining LiDAR, Radar, and Thermal imaging, the “brain” achieves a high Probability of Detection (Pd) for anomalies, such as unattended bags or perimeter breaches, and automates the initial response.
- **Personnel Safety:** By deploying robotic loaders for standardised freight, the airport removes human staff from high-risk “danger zones” near heavy machinery.
- **The Safety Simulator:** In a crisis, the Digital Twin acts as a simulator, identifying the safest evacuation routes in milliseconds

and guiding first responders with absolute clarity.

SUSTAINABILITY: THE SELF-REGULATING ORGANISM

For European and UK hubs, sustainability is now a “licence to operate.” A sentient airport acts as a self-regulating organism. Using real-time occupancy data, the “brain” adjusts Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning and lighting dynamically based on predicted passenger flow. This precision allows operators to track their carbon footprint minute by minute, ensuring full compliance with mandates such as ‘Jet Zero’.

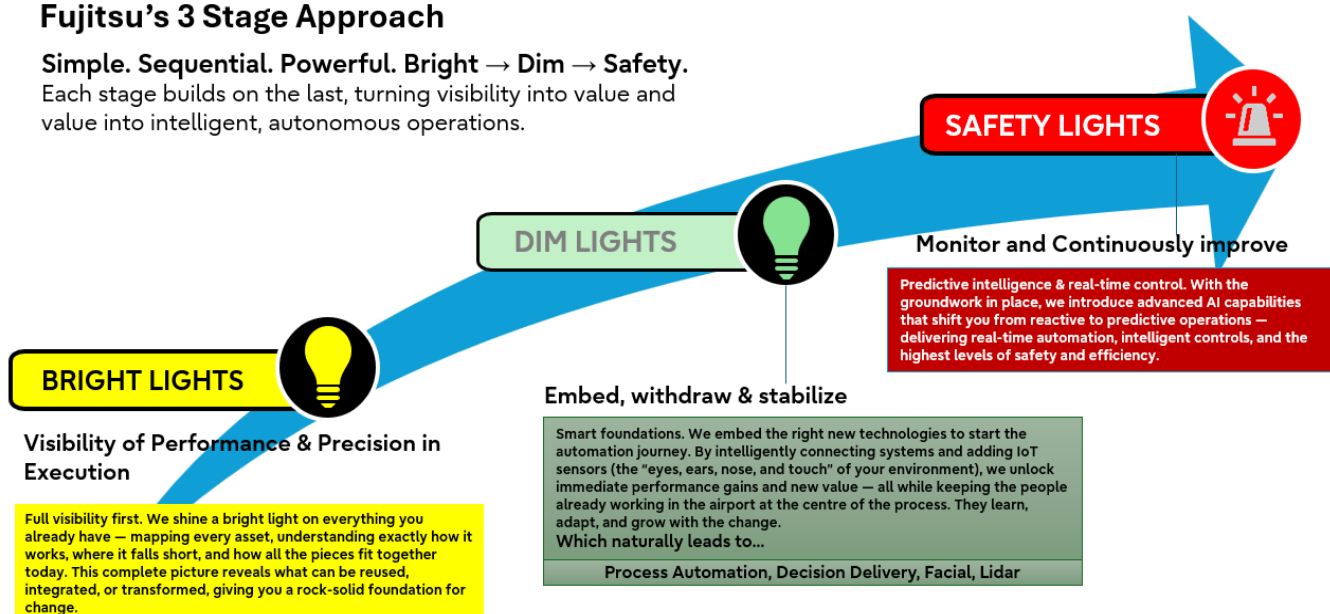
THE ROADMAP TO SENTIENCE: A PHASED JOURNEY

- **Phase 1: Visibility (Present – 2 Years):** Break the silos. Deploy the Sensory Network to build core situational awareness.
- **Phase 2: Prediction (2 – 5 Years):** Move from reactive to proactive. Use the AI Brain to forecast surges and simulate recovery plans.
- **Phase 3: Autonomy (5 – 10 Years):** The fully sentient hub. Roll out autonomous operations where the system becomes self-regulating and self-healing.

Fujitsu’s 3 Stage Approach

Simple. Sequential. Powerful. Bright → Dim → Safety.

Each stage builds on the last, turning visibility into value and value into intelligent, autonomous operations.



THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The transition to a sentient airport is the core enabler of the future airport business model. We are moving away from an era when value was derived from square footage and into an era when value is derived from data liquidity.

Airports that continue to manage assets in isolation will be burdened by escalating costs, stranded assets, and diminishing passenger loyalty. Without a "sentient" layer,

the costs of meeting sustainability mandates and labour shortages will erode EBITDA until growth becomes impossible. Conversely, the sentient hub treats every sensor as a revenue generator and every data point as a safety barrier.

The question is no longer if your airport will become sentient, but whether you will lead that transformation—or be outpaced by it. ■

Simon Body is Executive Digital Advisory at Fujitsu UK. Fujitsu is an AirportsUK Gold Member.

A wide-angle photograph of a modern airport terminal interior. The space is vast with a high ceiling featuring a series of long, white, curved structural beams and large skylights. The floor is highly reflective, showing the silhouettes of people and lights. In the background, there are check-in counters, baggage claim carousels, and various digital display screens. A few people are visible, including a person in the foreground who is blurred while walking with a suitcase. A large green rectangular box is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text.

"The transition to a sentient airport is the core enabler of the future airport business model. We are moving away from an era when value was derived from square footage and into an era when value is derived from data liquidity".



TERBERG DTS UK

CLEARING THE AIR: WHY TACKLING ULTRAFINE PARTICLE POLLUTION AT UK AIRPORTS MATTERS FOR GROUND HANDLERS

By Sam Brockington-Belli, Head of Aviation Sales, UK & Ireland, Terberg DTS UK

Airports are complex ecosystems—busy, essential, and deeply intertwined with local economies. But behind the scenes, thousands of ground handlers work daily in an environment where air quality has become an increasingly pressing concern. One pollutant in particular is attracting growing scientific and regulatory attention: **ultrafine particulate matter (UFP)**, the smallest and potentially most harmful form of airborne pollution associated with aviation activity.

Recent studies have illuminated the scale of the challenge and underscored the urgent need for the aviation sector to accelerate its shift toward cleaner technologies—especially the transition to electric ground support equipment (eGSE). The evidence clearly shows that improving air quality is not just an environmental obligation but an essential investment in the health, wellbeing, and retention of those who keep airports running.

THE INVISIBLE THREAT: UNDERSTANDING ULTRAFINE PARTICLES

Ultrafine particles, or UFPs, are defined as particulate matter with a diameter below 100 nanometres—around 1,000 times smaller than the width of a human hair. Their size allows them to travel deeply into the lungs and even into the bloodstream, brain, and placenta, raising growing alarms among health researchers.¹

Research is continuing all the time on the full extent of the health issues they (UFPs) create, and the exact level of the emissions at airports' sites, but it is clear the health impacts are real, airports are one of the hotspots for this form of pollution, and attention on this topic will only increase in the years ahead. Any negative effects from local air quality pollution may be felt by those on the airport site.



Sam Brockington-Belli

For ground handlers, this exposure is far more sustained than for passengers or occasional airport visitors. Aircraft take-off and landing cycles, auxiliary power units, and diesel-powered ground support equipment create a constant mix of emissions at nose level, where staff spend long shifts servicing aircraft, loading baggage, operating tugs, and managing fuels.

HEALTH IMPACTS: AN OCCUPATIONAL HAZARD HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

The health risks associated with UFP exposure are significant. Studies link ultrafine particulate pollution with an increased likelihood of respiratory issues, cardiovascular problems, impaired lung function, diabetes, dementia,

Electrifying GSE significantly cuts the release of ultrafine particles and other toxic pollutants at breathing height—directly improving ramp-side air quality. eGSE also reduces noise levels by 5.5 to 8 dB(A), creating a calmer and safer working environment for ground crews.

and pregnancy complications.^{2,3} Europe-wide analysis suggests UFPs may be associated with hundreds of thousands of additional cases of high blood pressure and diabetes, along with tens of thousands of dementia cases.^{4,5}

There is currently no specific regulation governing UFP levels, even though the World Health Organisation flagged them as a pollutant of “emerging concern” more than a decade ago.⁶ This regulatory gap leaves airports and operators facing a dual challenge: addressing a clear health risk while

navigating evolving expectations from workers, unions, and government agencies.

GROUND SUPPORT EQUIPMENT: A CRITICAL SOURCE—AND OPPORTUNITY

Traditional GSE powered by diesel or petrol engines has long been recognised as a major contributor to airport-level pollution, creating both particulate emissions and noise. While aircraft engines receive much of the public scrutiny, ground vehicles operate continuously throughout the day, often in close proximity to ground handlers.

A recent overview by IATA highlights that electric ground support equipment (eGSE) can reduce CO₂ emissions by 48% compared to internal combustion engine GSE, based on average EU electricity generation.⁷ Extrapolated globally, if all GSE had been electrified at 2019 traffic levels, the industry could have avoided 1.8 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions annually.⁸

But the benefits extend far beyond carbon reduction. Electrifying GSE significantly cuts the release of ultrafine particles and other toxic pollutants at breathing height—directly improving ramp-side air quality. eGSE also reduces noise levels by 5.5 to 8 dB(A), creating a calmer and safer working environment for ground crews.⁹

Across the UK, suppliers such as Terberg DTS now offer a wide range of electric GSE solutions, helping airports accelerate this shift and giving operators practical pathways to replace diesel-powered equipment with cleaner, quieter alternatives.

IMPROVING GROUND HANDLER HEALTH AND RETENTION

Airports across the UK continue to face challenges in recruiting and retaining ground handling staff. Improving air quality represents a tangible step toward addressing

The adoption of eGSE aligns with broader industry commitments such as the Fly Net Zero initiative, strengthening the sector's sustainability narrative while providing direct occupational health benefits.

these workforce pressures. Electrification reduces the daily exposure of ground handlers to harmful emissions, making ramp work healthier and more attractive.

Moreover, the adoption of eGSE aligns with broader industry commitments such as the Fly Net Zero initiative, strengthening the

sector's sustainability narrative while providing direct occupational health benefits.¹⁰

BEYOND ELECTRIFICATION: A HOLISTIC AIR QUALITY STRATEGY

While eGSE is essential, it must be part of a wider approach:

- **Cleaner jet fuels:** Using higher-quality,



hydrotreatment-processed fuels could reduce aircraft UFP emissions by up to 70%.¹¹

- **Improved monitoring:** The UK currently has very few long-term UFP monitoring sites, creating blind spots in understanding worker exposure.¹²
- **Reduced Auxiliary Power Unit use:** Ground power units and pre-conditioned air systems can reduce emissions generated by idling aircraft.
- **Training and safety awareness:** Educating ground staff about air quality risks empowers them to take protective measures.

A CLEANER FUTURE FOR UK AIRPORTS

The evidence is unequivocal: ultrafine particles present a hidden but serious threat to the health of ground handlers and communities around airports. Fortunately, practical, high-impact solutions—particularly the transition to electric GSE—are within reach.

By accelerating the adoption of eGSE, investing in cleaner fuels, and improving monitoring and reporting, UK airports can make decisive strides toward cleaner, safer ground operations. Suppliers like Terberg DTS, with established electric GSE portfolios, will play

an increasingly important role in supporting this transition.

Air quality is not just an environmental issue. It is a workforce issue, a public health issue, and a reputational issue for the entire aviation industry. And with the tools now available, the sector has an unprecedented opportunity to clean the air—quite literally—for those who keep it moving. ■

Terberg DTS UK is an AirportsUK Gold Member.



1. <https://www.transportenvironment.org/te-united-kingdom/articles/ultrafine-particles-from-planes-put-millions-of-people-across-the-uk-at-risk-of-serious-health-conditions>
2. <https://www.transportenvironment.org/te-united-kingdom/articles/ultrafine-particles-from-planes-put-millions-of-people-across-the-uk-at-risk-of-serious-health-conditions>
3. <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/airports-planes-particles-air-health-b2568340.html>
4. <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/airports-planes-particles-air-health-b2568340.html>
5. <https://www.transportenvironment.org/te-united-kingdom/articles/ultrafine-particles-from-planes-put-millions-of-people-across-the-uk-at-risk-of-serious-health-conditions>
6. <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/airports-planes-particles-air-health-b2568340.html>
7. <https://www.transportenvironment.org/te-united-kingdom/articles/ultrafine-particles-from-planes-put-millions-of-people-across-the-uk-at-risk-of-serious-health-conditions>
8. <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/tiny-particles-emitted-planes-putting-230100253.html>
9. <https://www.aef.org.uk/2024/06/25/airport-air-pollution-new-study/>
10. <https://www.transportenvironment.org/te-united-kingdom/articles/ultrafine-particles-from-planes-put-millions-of-people-across-the-uk-at-risk-of-serious-health-conditions>
11. <https://www.iata.org/en/programs/ops-infra/ground-operations/ground-ops-of-the-future/>
12. <https://www.iata.org/en/programs/ops-infra/ground-operations/ground-ops-of-the-future/>

NEW MEMBERS

AIRPORTSUK WELCOMES NEW CORPORATE PARTNER AND THREE NEW MEMBERS



Enterprise Mobility

Enterprise Mobility, a leading provider of mobility solutions, has become AirportUK's newest Corporate Partner.

Managing the Enterprise Rent-A-Car, National Car Rental and Alamo Rent a Car brands, the organisation's global network offers a range of services including car rental, fleet management, flexible vehicle hire, carsharing, vehicle subscription, and transportation technology services and solutions. Enterprise Mobility describes itself as people-focused, solution oriented and committed to pairing the right vehicle with the right customer by understanding every person's unique travel journey, preferences and needs.

The organisation says that it plays an active role in supporting airports, working collaboratively to provide reliable, efficient and customer-focused mobility services. Enterprise Mobility says that its strong partnerships with UK airports help strengthen operational performance, enhance the passenger experience and ensure essential mobility infrastructure remains fit for the future, with a shared commitment to supporting airport ecosystems, regional connectivity and broader economic growth.



Dalkia UK

Dalkia UK, a specialist technical and energy services company that is part of the EDF Group, has joined AirportsUK as a Gold Member.

The company provides specialist technical, engineering, and facilities management services to the aviation sector, delivering infrastructure, upgrading lighting and baggage systems and designing and building new aircraft hangars.

Its key aviation-related activities have included:

- lighting and safety, installing state-of-the-art LED lighting technology for the A538 Manchester Airport tunnels, which serve runways 1 and 2
- airport services, upgrading baggage handling systems at Stansted Airport, including Mechanical and Electrical design and installation and removal of old services
- infrastructure development, designing and building facilities at RAF Marham, near King's Lynn, for operational conversion, including hangars and vertical landing pads for F-35 aircraft, and
- facility support, providing ongoing technical, energy and maintenance services for secure, critical operational environments.

Dalkia also focuses on energy efficiency and decarbonisation, supporting aviation clients with sustainable infrastructure solutions.



Puragen

Puragen

Puragen, part of the privately owned international industrial and engineering group, Invica, has joined AirportsUK as a Silver Member.

The company describes itself as a global leader in advanced activated carbon solutions, combining deep scientific expertise with integrated engineering, manufacturing and service capabilities. It says that it delivers high-performance purification technologies to address complex environmental challenges, including PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) removal across a range of applications, municipal and industrial water treatment, as well as Volatile Organic Compounds and odour control in air and gas applications.

It describes its solutions as being underpinned by the FiltraPure® range of high-performance activated carbons, engineered for efficient contaminant capture. These solutions are supported by Puragen's REACT-Sys® technology, which enables the permanent destruction of PFAS molecules and the safe recycling of spent carbon. Together, Puragen says, these capabilities provide a closed-loop, low-carbon and sustainable purification lifecycle, helping customers reduce regulatory risk, control costs and meet increasingly stringent environmental standards worldwide.

NAVTECH RADAR

Navtech Radar

Navtech Radar, a global designer and manufacturer of radar solutions to security problems, has joined AirportsUK as an Associate Member.

Deployed in over 50 airports worldwide, including Bristol and Jersey airports, its AdvanceGuard for airports provides perimeter intrusion detection and wide area surveillance capabilities to ensure that potential threats are detected before incursion events. The company says that it offers uninterrupted and reliable detection and tracking of airside activity and can be easily integrated with other systems, automatically providing reliable, continual situation awareness 24/7/365, in all light and weather conditions; it can detect Foreign Object Debris, monitor runway incursions, provide Surface Movement Radar, and monitor the apron area.

EVENTS & MEETINGS 2026

Health & Safety Group Virtual meeting

20 March @ 1:00pm – 3:00pm

Airspace & Air Traffic Services (AATS)

AirportsUK Office

25 March @ 11:00am – 1:00pm

Sustainability Working Group Virtual meeting

26 March @ 9:30am – 10:30am

Security Group

AirportsUK Office

26 March @ 11:00am – 12:30pm

Security Group (Airports only)

AirportsUK Office

26 March @ 1:30pm – 3:00pm

Public Affairs Communications Network (PACN) & Policy Committee (Airports only)

AirportsUK Office

14 April @ 11:00am – 1:00pm

Rescue & Fire Fighting Services (RFFS)

Virtual meeting

15 April @ 11:00am – 1:00pm

AirportsUK Board Meeting

AirportsUK Office

28 April @ 10:30am – 1:00pm

Airports Conference: Sustainability Radisson Blu Hotel, Glasow

6 – 7 May

Fire Safety Forum (FSF)

Virtual meeting

7 May @ 1:30pm – 3:30pm

Aerodrome Safety & Compliance (ASC)

AirportsUK Office

11 May @ 11:00am – 1:00pm

UK Airports Health & Safety Week

Various Airports

11–15 May

Airspace & Air Traffic Services (AATS)

Virtual Meeting

18 May @ 2:00pm – 3:30pm

Health & Safety Group

AirportsUK Office

4 June @ 11:00am – 1:00pm

General Counsels Forum (Airports only)

Virtual Meeting

12 June @ 2:00pm – 4:00pm

Public Affairs Communications Network (PACN) & Policy Committee (Airports only)

AirportsUK Office

16 June @ 11:00am – 1:00pm

Planners Forum (Airports only)

Manchester Airport

17 June @ 11:00am – 4:00pm

Rescue & Fire Fighting Services (RFFS)

Virtual meeting

18 June @ 11:00am – 1:00pm

Security Group

AirportsUK Office

18 June @ 11:00am – 12:30pm

Security Group (Airports only)

AirportsUK Office

18 June @ 1:30pm – 3:00pm

AirportsUK Board Meeting

AirportsUK Office

30 June @ 10:30am – 1:00pm

Airport Conference: Operations Hilton Hotel, Bournemouth 1 – 2 July

Sustainability Group Virtual meeting

9 July @ 10:00am – 11:00am

Aerodrome Safety & Compliance (ASC)

Virtual Meeting

9 July @ 2:00pm – 4:00pm

Public Affairs Communications Network (PACN) & Policy Committee (Airports only)

AirportsUK Office

8 September @ 11:00am – 1:00pm

Health & Safety Group

Virtual Meeting

9 September @ 2:00pm – 4:00pm

Airport Conference: Security Radisson Blu, Manchester Airport

16 – 17 September

AirportsUK Board Meeting

AirportsUK Office

22 September @ 10:30am – 1:00pm

Sustainability Group

Virtual meeting

24 September @ 10:00am – 12:00 midday

Aerodrome Safeguarding

Virtual Meeting

24 September @ 11:00am – 1:00pm

Fire Safety Forum

Virtual meeting

28 September @ 1:30pm – 3:30pm

Airspace & Air Traffic Services (AATS)

Virtual Meeting

29 September @ 11:00am – 1:30pm



Aerodrome Safety & Compliance (ASC)

London Biggin Hill Airport

1 October @ 11:00am – 4:00pm

Planners Forum (Airports only)

Virtual meeting

6 October @ 11:00am – 12:30pm

Rescue & Fire Fighting Services (RFFS)

Airport Visit

21 October @ 11:30am – 4:00pm
(time tbc)

Public Affairs Communications Network (PACN) & Policy Committee (Airports only)

AirportsUK Office

3 November @ 11:00am – 1:00pm

Health & Safety Group

Birmingham Airport

12 November @ 11:00am – 4:00pm (time tbc)

General Counsels Forum (Airports only)

Virtual Meeting

13 November @ 2:00pm – 4:00pm

AirportsUK Board Meeting

AirportsUK Office

17 November @ 10:30am – 3:00pm

Security Group

AirportsUK Office

3 December @ 11:00am – 12:30pm

Security Group (Airports only)

AirportsUK Office

3 December @ 1:30pm – 3:00pm

Fire Safety Forum

Virtual meeting

8 December @ 1:30pm – 3:30pm





From around the sector

BIRMINGHAM AIRPORT OFFERS AIRLINES FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO SECURE SERVICES TO NEW YORK

The Board of Birmingham Airport has announced a multi-million dollar offer to secure the return of direct scheduled services to New York next summer.

Birmingham lost its New York connections in 2017 when United stopped its service to Newark and American Airlines ended its flights to New York JFK. The airport's multi-year financial support offer will see it invest several million dollars in a bid to secure direct, scheduled services

between Birmingham and New York from summer 2027, coinciding with the Invictus Games being held in Birmingham.

Nick Barton, the airport's CEO, said "We have been in airline discussions where we are reassured it is not if, but when direct US connectivity returns to Birmingham. The demand and business case is proven. This unique financial offer demonstrates our determination to secure the return of this direct US route. Re-establishing a direct air service to



New York would be transformational for the West Midlands".

West Midlands Mayor, Richard Parker, said "Direct US flights from Birmingham Airport would deliver significant benefits

for trade, tourism and inward investment. The airport's financial offer sends a strong signal that the region wants to be open for global business, and every lever needs to be pulled to re-establish this critical connection". ■

LONDON CITY AIRPORT APPOINTS ANDY CLIFFE AS NEW CEO

London City Airport has appointed Andy Cliffe as its new Chief Executive Officer with immediate effect. The airport's current CEO, Alison Fitzgerald, will step down following a managed handover period.

Cliffe has held senior leadership roles at Manchester Airports Group and most recently served as Group CEO of AGS Airports. He is an Operating Partner at Macquarie Asset Management and supported its acquisition

of a stake in London City Airport which completed last year. He then joined the airport's Board where he has played an active role in shaping its long-term strategic priorities under the new ownership.

Speaking on the day his appointment was announced, Cliffe said "London City has a unique market position and an exceptional opportunity ahead of it. LCY consistently sets the gold standard for customer service among London's airports and is the closest airport for more than half of all Londoners. I look

forward to working with the talented LCY team and our partners to build on the strong foundations created by Alison, to deliver sustainable growth, enhance our airline offering and ensure the airport continues to play a vital role for London and the UK economy".

Fitzgerald said "It has been an honour to lead this fantastic airport and to work alongside such an incredible team. I am proud of our achievements and the progress we have made in strengthening the airport's operations, customer experience and

future growth potential. I am grateful for the support shown to the airport by our airline and industry partners throughout my time at LCY, and I look forward to seeing the airport continue to thrive in the years ahead". ■



AIRPORTSUK AIRPORT CONFERENCES 2026



**6-7
May**

**Airport Sustainability
Conference
Glasgow**



**1-2
July**

**Airport Operations
Conference
Bournemouth**



**16-17
September**

**Airport Security
Conference
Manchester Airport**

Dates and locations are subject to change





From around the sector

MASS TRANSIT LINK PROPOSED FOR BRISTOL AIRPORT

A proposal for a new mass transit link between Bristol Airport and Bristol city centre has been outlined by the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority.

Bristol Airport is currently the largest in the UK without a fixed mass transit link and, in a newly

published Transport Vision document, the authority said that a high-capacity and high-frequency service is much-needed and could be delivered within four to five years. It suggests that the link could be developed with small, electrically powered rail vehicles running on a fixed track. Dave Lees, the airport's

CEO, said "It's fantastic to see this Vision published and we look forward to supporting the further work needed to make it a reality in the future. We've invested heavily in our bus network, and, uniquely in the UK, staff bus travel is free, which has led to record numbers of people using public transport to access the airport,

but much more could be done if the region works together. It would enable more people to get to the airport by public transport and, as one of the biggest private sector employers locally, it would connect the thousands of jobs we offer to more people". ■

NEW CAA DATA SHOWS RECORD LEVEL OF CONSUMER SATISFACTION

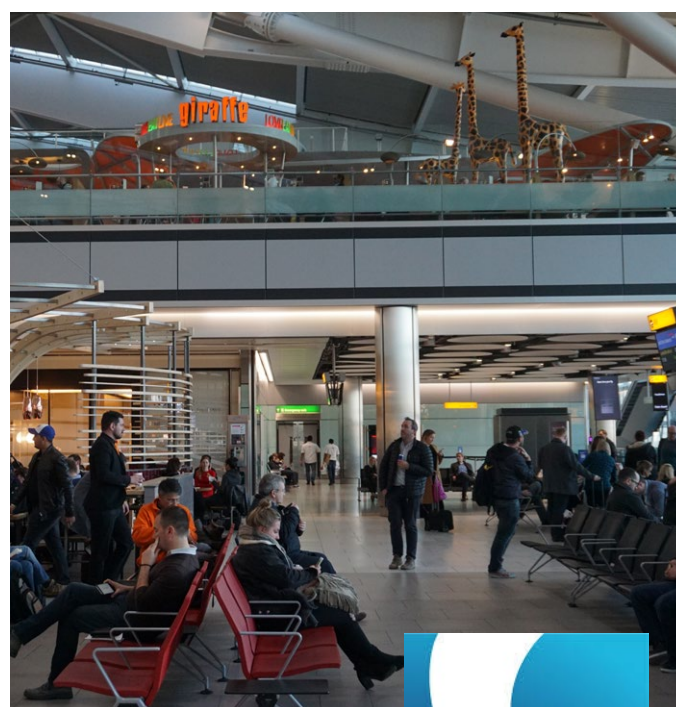
Overall satisfaction with flying has hit its highest level (88%) since 2016, when the UK Civil Aviation Authority's annual consumer survey started.

The data suggest that rising passenger numbers will continue this year, with nearly a third of consumers planning to fly more in 2026 than they did last year. In particular, nearly half of 18- to 34-year-olds plan to take more flights this year, higher than other age groups.

Selina Chadha, the CAA's Group Director of Consumers and Markets, said "Consumers want to fly more and 2026 is lining up to be another year of growth, fuelled by demand from younger

passengers. Whilst it is encouraging that 88% of consumers are satisfied with their overall experience of flying, this figure drops for certain vulnerability groups, including those with accessibility/disability needs".

Karen Dee, Chief Executive of AirportUK, said "It is great to see satisfaction with flying reach new heights in this consumer survey, and to see that translated into people expecting to fly more this year. Airports know there remains work to be done to ensure that the experience is a positive one for all those who wish to fly, especially those with additional needs. The upward trend in satisfaction levels demonstrates our members are working



hard, delivering great levels of service and keeping the UK connected to the world". ■

UK
Civil Aviation
Authority

JERSEY AIRPORT BOOSTED BY NEW SERVICES TO AMSTERDAM, DUBLIN AND PARIS

Hit by the collapse of Jersey-based Blue Islands last November, Jersey Airport has bounced back with new services to Amsterdam, Dublin, Paris and two English regional airports.

KLM has announced a new summer service between Jersey and Amsterdam, with weekly flights from 4 April and daily flights in July and

August. Matt Thomas, Chief Executive of Ports of Jersey, described the new link as "an exciting moment for our island's connectivity, opening Jersey to KLM's global network, meaning islanders can reach major international destinations with one simple connection. We're proud to see this long-term ambition becoming a reality".

Loganair is also enhancing Jersey's air

connectivity with the launch of four new routes to Dublin, Paris, East Midlands and Norwich, adding to existing services to Bristol, Exeter and Southampton. The introduction of the Jersey to Paris service marks Loganair's first-ever commercial route to France. The Dublin route will operate twice weekly from 1 June, Paris three times weekly from 31 May, East Midlands daily from 31 May and Norwich weekly from 9 May.

Thomas said the launch of the four new services represented "another key milestone as we strengthen our partnership and help Loganair build their base in Jersey. The island's Minister for Sustainable Economic Development, Deputy Kirsten Morel, said she was "delighted Loganair is growing its network this summer, and I'm particularly pleased with the inclusion of services to Paris CDG". ■

PRESTWICK CARGO VOLUMES SET TO TREBLE AS THE AIRPORT JOINS KEIR STARMER'S CHINA VISIT

Glasgow Prestwick Airport's CEO, Ian Forgie, has forecast that its cargo volumes will treble in 2025/26, with the airport now operating 12 scheduled cargo services to China a week.

Prestwick was the only UK aviation business that took part in the Prime Minister's visit to China at the end of January. Forgie said "over the past year, Prestwick has made significant progress in attracting Chinese investment and building

long-term partnerships that deliver real economic value for Scotland and the UK. Our invitation to the Prime Minister's state visit was testament to this, our forward-thinking growth strategy, and the hard work of the entire team".

Colin Dai, Prestwick's Regional Director for Asia, attended a diplomatic reception hosted by the British Embassy in Shanghai, joining Sir Keir Starmer, Peter Kyle, Secretary of State for Business and Trade, and a group of business leaders from the UK and China. Dai said that the visit had allowed Prestwick to "share

practical insight into how aviation and logistics infrastructure can support sustainable trade growth".

Air China Cargo and China Southern Airlines opened bases at Prestwick last May, operating routes to Chengdu and Guangzhou that are expected to facilitate £250m of cross-border trade this year. Prestwick's Chair, Willie



Mackie, said the airport's financial performance over the last year had been "exceptional and in particular the growth in the airport's cargo operations has been truly transformational". ■



From around the sector

SOUTHAMPTON AIRPORT IS LOGANAIR'S NEWEST BASE

Loganair's new Southampton base will reach full operational capacity this month, with two aircraft permanently based at the airport.

The base, Loganair's tenth, began operations in January and from this month will support three flights a day to Manchester, up to three flights a day to Edinburgh, two flights a day to Newcastle and daily flights to Jersey.

Chris Tibbett, Aviation Director at AGS Airports, said "This is a fantastic milestone for Southampton Airport and a clear demonstration of Loganair's commitment to strengthening regional connectivity. Establishing

a permanent base in Southampton not only enhances travel options for our passengers but also delivers tangible benefits for the local economy through job creation and increased business opportunities".

"Southampton's position as a key gateway for the South Coast makes this investment particularly significant. The addition of routes such as Manchester which started last October reconnected vital economic corridors and, through Loganair's extensive interline partnerships, provide even greater global connectivity for our customers".

Ronnie Matheson, Loganair's Chief Commercial Officer, said



"The start of operations at our Southampton base represents an important step in strengthening the resilience of our network and ensuring consistent, reliable airlinks for the South Coast. Establishing a permanent base in Southampton allows us to better support an area of the country that is

often overlooked, while providing our customers with dependable services and improved operational stability. As we scale up operations, Southampton will play an increasingly important role in our UK network, supporting both regional travel and vital onward connections". ■

GIBRALTAR TREATY OPENS DOOR TO FLIGHTS BETWEEN GIBRALTAR AIRPORT AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

The text of a draft treaty on Gibraltar between the UK and the EU published on 26 February opens the prospect of flights between Gibraltar, Spain and other EU countries.

Currently Gibraltar Airport's flights are all to and from the UK, but the UK Government said

that the agreement "will provide new economic opportunities for the region, by enabling flights between Gibraltar and the European Union which have, for the most part, been suspended for decades".

The 1,000-page treaty, which will need to be ratified by both the Gibraltar Parliament and the European Parliament,

contains an aviation chapter setting out arrangements for the day-to-day management of the airport and for flights to and from the Schengen zone, with Spanish officials overseeing Schengen biometric controls while Gibraltar officials maintain local checks.

Under the terms of the treaty EU aviation

measures will apply to ground handling, slots, charges and the rights of passengers with reduced mobility. The treaty could come into provisional effect as early as April, but full implementation will be subject to ratification by the Gibraltar and European parliaments and scrutiny by the UK Parliament. ■

PASSENGER NUMBERS AT SOUTHEND AIRPORT UP BY 150%

A total of 720,000 passengers passed through London Southend Airport in 2025, up 150% on the previous year, confirming its status as the UK's fastest growing airport.

Reflecting on the 2025 "milestone results". the

airport's CEO, Jude Winstanley, said "These 12 months were always going to be important in terms of the airport's turnaround and establishing ourselves as London's challenger airport. I was delighted to see a bustling terminal last year, with more than 50,000 passengers passing through the

airport each month after the easyJet base opened in April. Finishing 2025 as the UK's fastest growing airport was marvellous and we fully expect 2026 to be another busy year for us".

The airport's top five destinations last year were Palma, Malaga, Amsterdam, Alicante

and Paris. Spain was the standout destination country, with almost 345,000 passengers travelling there, including also flights to Almeria, Tenerife and Las Palmas. London Southend will offer 26 routes this year, with new routes for this summer to Barcelona, Berlin, Ibiza, Jersey and Munich. ■

GATWICK GEARS UP FOR BIGGEST SUMMER SINCE 2019 AS RECORD NUMBER OF AIRLINES TAKE OFF

London Gatwick Airport is preparing for its busiest summer season since 2019, with a record number of airlines, new destinations and expanded long-haul options.

The airport will have more than 230 destinations on offer this summer, across Europe, Asia, the Middle East, North America, the Caribbean and Africa, operated by 62 airlines, including eight new carriers.

Emirates launched a fourth daily Dubai service in February. Operated on the new Airbus A350, the first to serve England, the service re-introduces Premium Economy for Gatwick passengers and offers the latest Dubai – Europe flight of any airline.



Passengers will benefit from eight new arrivals – Jet2 (operating 29 routes across Spain, Turkey, Portugal, Cyprus, Malta, Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and Croatia throughout the summer), AirAsia X (daily to Kuala Lumpur), Condor (21 times weekly to Frankfurt), Air Arabia (14 times weekly to Sharjah), Air France (14 times weekly

to Paris), Eurowings (13 times weekly to Cologne), Animawings (daily to Bucharest) and Beijing Capital Airlines (weekly to Qingdao). Existing carriers expanding their connectivity include Royal Air Maroc to Tetouan, Norwegian to Aalborg and Air Transat to Ottawa. Pierre Hugues-Schmit,

the airport's Chief Executive, said "This will be a fantastic summer for our passengers. Our ever-expanding list of carriers and destinations, combined with our unwavering commitment to excellent passenger service, means London Gatwick really is the airport for everyone, whatever your journey". ■



From around the sector



BOURNEMOUTH AND EXETER AIRPORTS' PASSENGER NUMBERS SOAR

Bournemouth and Exeter airports, both part of Regional & City Airports, saw their passenger numbers increase by 27% last year – placing them both among the UK's fastest growing airports.

Bournemouth recorded its busiest summer ever, delivering the strongest performance in the airport's history. The surge was driven largely by the arrival in February 2025 of Jet2.com and Jet2holidays, who made Bournemouth their 12th UK base, launching 16 routes. Jet2 plans to increase capacity at the airport by 5% this summer, adding new routes to Kos and Reykjavik.

Steve Gill, the airport's Managing Director, said that Jet2's arrival had been "transformational" for Bournemouth, adding that "their first summer of operations

contributed significantly to our best ever summer last year and 2026 is shaping up to be another great year for the airport.

The increase in passenger numbers at Exeter followed a year that saw the launch of daily KLM flights to Amsterdam, the first time the global carrier has operated from Exeter, as well as a decision by TUI to base a second aircraft at the airport over the summer, doubling its flying capacity, with 50 flights per week to 13 destinations.

Stephen Wilshire, Managing Director of Exeter Airport, said "This was a fantastic year for Exeter. The arrival of KLM, offering worldwide connections via Amsterdam, together with TUI's expanded summer programme transformed our route network and helped drive this strong recovery in passenger numbers". ■





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