

GEORGE BEST BELFAST CITY AIRPORT FORUM

Minutes of Meeting No.61

Held on Wednesday, 23rd June 2010 in Conference Room 1 at 7.00pm

Present:	Mr. Alan Crowe	Chairman
	Mr. Alan Walker	Vice Chairman
	Mr. Brian Ambrose	George Best Belfast City Airport
	Mr. Gordon Wright	Hollywood Residents' Association
	Mr. Patrick Knatchbull	Cultra Residents' Association
	Mr. John Prifti	Helen's Bay & Crawfordsburn Residents' Association
	Mr. John McNair	Marmont & District Community Association
	Mr. Colm McNamee	Park Road and District Residents' Association
	Capt. Ian Ewer	Base Captain Bmi
	Cllr. Cathal Mullaghan	Belfast City Council
	Cllr. Robin Newton	Belfast City Council
	Mrs. Julie Allen	Belfast City Council
	Mr. Sean Coulter	Department for Regional Development
	Mr. Andy McClenaghan	Northern Ireland Consumer Council
	Mr. Mark Doherty	Belfast Harbour Commissioners
	Mr. Kevin Armstrong	DoE Planning Service
In attendance:	Ms. Laura Duggan	George Best Belfast City Airport

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

Mr. John Moore	Belfast Chamber of Commerce
Alderman Leslie Cree	North Down Borough Council
Mr. Terry Hoey	Palmerston Residents Association
Mrs. Lisa Toland	Belfast City Council
Ms. Laura McCorry	Northern Ireland Tourist Board
Mr. Mark Beattie	George Best Belfast City Airport

2. WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

The Chairman welcomed all present to the meeting, in particular, the community group member for South Belfast, Mr. Colm McNamee, representing Park Road and District Residents Association. The Chairman also welcomed Mrs. Julie Allen to the Forum. Mrs. Allen will be taking over from Mrs. Siobhan Toland as Mrs. Toland has been promoted to a new role in Belfast City Council as Head of Environment. The Chairman expressed his gratitude to Mrs.

Toland on behalf of the Forum for her support and ongoing contribution to the Forum over the years.

3. MINUTES OF THE FORUM MEETING HELD ON 31st MARCH 2010

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

4.1 On 20th May 2010, a panel of Forum members met to consider the application from Park Road and District Residents' Association to represent South Belfast on the Forum. It was agreed by the panel that the application met the criteria and as such, Park Road and District Residents' Association should be awarded a seat on the Forum.

4.2 Ms. Duggan advised that the minutes from the last Forum meeting (31st March 2010) will be uploaded to the BCA Forum web page once they have been approved by Forum members.

4.3 Ms. Duggan requested that Forum members contact her should they wish to take up the invitation of a tour of the new airport facilities.

Action: Forum Members

4.4 Ms. Duggan confirmed that a document was circulated with the previous Forum minutes detailing revenues and expenditures for the Community Fund to date.

4.5 Mr. McNair queried the exact areas of distribution for the Community Newsletter because he had not received a copy despite being a resident of East Belfast. Ms. Duggan said that she would look into this.

Action: Forum Secretary

4.6 Ms. Duggan confirmed that the Environmental Sub Group minutes were circulated to Forum members with the previous meeting minutes.

Mr. McNamee queried if there was an incident at the Airport earlier in the day which warranted media attention. Mr. Ambrose confirmed that a full emergency situation was declared at the Airport when a helicopter raised an alarm approximately two miles from the Airport. However, the situation was 'stood down' within two minutes and there was nothing to report.

Captain Ewer explained to Forum members that there might not necessarily be a major problem for a pilot to prompt a full emergency but rather it may be as a precautionary measure. Mr Ambrose added to this by saying that the aviation industry by nature is very

cautious and that the number of actual emergency incidents since the Airport commenced commercial operations have been minimal.

5. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

5.1 Airport Performance:

- Provisional passenger numbers for first six months of 2010 are up 10% on 2009 and a total of 2.8 – 2.9 million passengers have been forecast for the year 2010.
- Air Transport Movements (ATMs) are forecast to be 43,000 in 2010.

5.2 **Capital Investment:** The new departure lounge was officially opened on 18th May 2010 by the Minister for Enterprise Trade and Investment, Arlene Foster. The new lounge offers a 60% increase in retail space. Costa Coffee has moved to a new two tier facility freeing up space in the main concourse.

5.3 Runway Extension:

- Confirmation has yet to be received of the date for a public inquiry into the proposed runway extension or the topics that will be discussed. It is expected to be November of this year.

5.4 Seats for Sale:

- The Minister has advised that he is 'minded to remove' the seats for sale limit at the Airport. A period of consultation will take place and the Forum has been nominated an official consultee. As such, this matter has been included as a separate agenda item for this meeting for discussion.

5.5 Operations:

Volcanic Ash – resulted in 12 full days of lost operations and circa £500,000 losses for the Airport. The airlines were significantly impacted with individual airlines reporting losses of an estimated £50 million.

A discussion was had on the necessity of the stringent no-fly measures enforced by the CAA during the volcanic ash incident. Mr. Ambrose commented that given the unprecedented nature of this incident, data needed to be gathered in order to fully understand the impact of the ash on aircraft engines. Given the cautious nature of the aviation industry, full closures were required until this evidence base could be built up. Now that data is available, new parameters have evolved regarding aircraft engine tolerance and as such, it is unlikely that we will see such blanket closures should an incident of this nature occur again.

Cllr. Mullaghan queried if aircraft are inspected to ensure that ash is not building up in the aircraft engines following the revision upwards of engine ash tolerance levels.

Capt. Ewer said that the danger is really when aircraft fly through high levels of volcanic ash. Once data could be collected and analysed from test flights the level of volcanic ash that it was deemed safe to fly through was revised upwards. That being said, detailed routine checks are carried out on aircraft engines to ensure that there is no ash build up.

Low Cloud – further partial day closure due to unusually low cloud base at 300ft restricting visibility.

Wake Vortex – two incidents of roof damage potentially as a result of wake vortices are currently being investigated. These investigations will be concluded in the coming weeks and the report will be lodged with the DRD, DOE and CAA for scrutiny purposes.

Mr. Ambrose explained to Forum members the phenomenon. It is caused by air disturbance from aircraft on approach to land. Wake Vortices usually break up in the air but on occasion can reach the ground usually in cases of calm and warm weather conditions and those resulting from wide bodied aircraft.

In the 27 years of operation at Belfast City Airport and over 1 million flights, there have been three or four incidents of wake vortices reaching the ground. This is because about 80% of arrivals are usually over Belfast Lough and due to the fact that wide bodied aircraft do not operate at the Airport. It is a common phenomenon, however, at other airports, for example Birmingham and Manchester, and these airports have a specific policy to follow when incidents occur.

Mr. Ambrose confirmed that legally it is the airline's responsibility for repairing wake vortex damage. However, Belfast City Airport, not wanting the affected residents to be exposed to the elements pending further investigation, took a proactive approach by going out to inspect the properties and repair the damage – without accepting liability.

Concerning the two incidents under investigation, Mr. Ambrose said that while it is not possible to determine the exact cause of the dislodged roof tiles retrospectively, one case did indeed bear the hallmarks of vortex damage, while the other case was reported to have happened during a period of wet conditions which is not usually conducive to wake vortices.

Mr. McNair queried if wake vortex damage was due to vibration and if there would be an increase in incidents if the proposed runway extension went ahead because it would enable heavier planes (due to greater fuel loads) to operate at the Airport. Mr. Ambrose confirmed that a wake vortex is not considered to be vibration and that aircraft would not be coming into land with heavier fuel reserves as this is not normal practice for aircraft arrivals. Captain Ewer confirmed this point stating that an aircraft will normally only have sufficient fuel reserves on approach to range a proximate airport in the case of diversion.

Mr. Knatchbull commented that the aircraft operating at the Airport in recent years are nearly wide bodied and are very noisy. Mr. Ambrose confirmed that the jet aircraft currently in operation at Belfast City Airport – the Boeing 737, Airbus 320 and the Embraer 195 are considered narrow bodied aircraft. Wide bodied aircraft are typically used to serve long haul destinations such as the Boeing 747, 767 and 777 or the Airbus 330 / 340.

Mr. McNamee queried if the Airport had plans to operate wide bodied aircraft in the future. Mr. Ambrose responded by saying that given the relatively small population of Northern Ireland, it would not be logical or economically viable to do so. Furthermore, the structure of the runway would not accept this type of aircraft.

Mr. Wright commented that he was acquainted with the residents of Parkgate Crescent that were affected by the wake vortex damage and confirmed that while they were upset at the time of the incident they were very pleased with the prompt response of the Airport and that it could not be faulted in this regard. Cllr Newton endorsed this comment.

Mr. Ambrose informed Forum members that he had received an invitation from Belfast City Airport Watch to attend a public meeting in Connswater Community Centre on 30th June 2010. Mr. Ambrose advised that he has responded in writing to Belfast City Airport Watch declining the invitation on the grounds that the Airport already liaises with local residents groups and will continue to do so through the Airport Forum. He advised Belfast City Airport Watch of this Forum meeting and that if the group had any specific issues to raise that the Airport Forum members would be happy to table them at the Forum.

Mr. McNamee expressed his disappointment with the Airport's decision to decline this invitation on the grounds that Belfast City Airport Watch represents many more residents groups than are present around the table at the Forum.

Mr. Ambrose stated it is the intention for the Airport to liaise with local groups through the Airport Forum as a properly constituted channel for this purpose. Furthermore, the Airport Forum is open to all properly constituted residents groups to join as is evident from the recent recruitment process. Mr. Crowe added to this by saying that despite the fact that this recruitment process was widely publicised by the Airport, there was not a huge response from residents groups.

Mr. Walker ended the discussion by expressing his wish for the Airport to continue to engage with stakeholders through the Forum as the statutory body designated for this purpose because this is the most effective use of the Airport's time and resources.

5.6 Irish News Award:

Belfast City Airport was awarded the Irish News *Work Life & Well Being* award at a ceremony at the Ramada Hotel on 17th June 2010.

5.7 **Tourism Strategy:**

Mr. Ambrose advised Forum members that he had met with Minister Arlene Foster regarding the development of a tourism strategy given that the industry has been struggling of late. A plan is to be developed specific to Belfast focusing on a number of key areas:

- Aligning tourism promotion with conferences, events and exhibitions taking place in the city
- Promoting Belfast in Great Britain as a tourist destination ideal for city breaks, etc.
- Exploiting tourism opportunities arising from a number of key upcoming events such as the 2012 Olympics, the Titanic centenary, Maiden City Anniversary, World Police and Fire Games, etc.

Mr. McNamee queried if the figure of 1,600 staff on site that is often quoted refers to Belfast City Airport staff. Mr Ambrose said that it has been the policy in recent years to outsource many of the functions of the Airport, including security, baggage handling and so forth. The 1,600 refers to staff from the 41 companies operating on site as well as the BCA core workforce of just under 100 people comprising Airport Fire-fighters, Air Traffic Controllers, Information Desk and back-of-house staff.

6. **AIRPORT STATISTICS**

Mr. Ambrose gave an update on the Forum Reports:

- Historical summary of movements post 21:30 hrs
- Analysis of delays post 21:30 hrs
- Bias of flights over Belfast Lough
- Analysis of movements post 23:00 hrs local
- Movements by aircraft type
- Analysis of noise related complaints 2009-2010

Mr. Knatchbull queried why there were departures operating after 23:00. Mr. Ambrose clarified the terms of the Planning Agreement, that while the Airport is only permitted to schedule flights between the hours of 06:30 and 21:30, it is permitted to operate delayed flights between 21:31 and 23:59 in exceptional circumstances.

Mr. Ambrose stated that given there are approximately 110 flights per day there is the eventuality of a certain number of delays, for example, due to a technical fault with an aircraft or weather. Given the range of functions that must be reconciled for each turnaround, from check-in to baggage, to aircraft fuelling, etc., it is unrealistic to expect for all flights to operate on time. That being said, the Airport is conscious that flights after 23:00, in particular, can cause a greater level of disturbance to local residents, and as such, the Airport has made efforts to reduce the number of delayed flights operating after this time. This is evident in the statistics which show a reduction in post 23:00 flights year on year. It was at the request of Forum members that the Airport report separately on flights after 23:00.

Mr. Ambrose drew the Forum's attention to Easyjet's performance (post 23:00 hrs) and advised that they are more prone to delays given the fact that the Easyjet Luton aircraft operates a European sector route during the day. The Airport has been working with Easyjet however, on this matter.

Mr. McNair queried if the airlines would ever operate empty aircraft after 21:30 for repositioning purposes. Mr. Ambrose confirmed that this is not the case.

Mr. McNamee commented that the Belfast City Airport should not be operating late night flights because it is not like other airports given its close proximity to residential areas. Mr. Ambrose stated that this is not the case. It is not unique that the Airport is close to residential areas but that it is unique in terms of its proximity to a city centre. The Airport is governed by the CAA, Department for Transport in the UK, and the Department for Regional Development in Northern Ireland, among others and the Airport goes beyond compliance in many cases. That being said, the Airport does acknowledge that living under the flight path is annoying and does not dispute this fact. If the Airport is falling short of its obligations then it is up to the Airport Forum to challenge it and make it aware and the Airport welcomes this approach.

Mr. McNamee stated that it would statistically be the case that with a growth in the volume of flights at Belfast City Airport there would also be a growth in the number of delays after 21:30. Mr. Ambrose said that based on statistics this has not be the case previously as delayed flights have been decreasing year on year since 2007 despite a growth in ATMs.

7. COMMUNITY FUND

Ms. Duggan gave an update to Forum members on the recently established Community Fund criteria and application process. Ms. Duggan advised that these details will be available on the Airport's website. Mr. Knatchbull requested if the contact details for the Community Fund co-ordinator could be circulated to Forum members.

Action: Forum Secretary

8. NOISE & TRACK MONITORING SYSTEM UPDATE

Ms. Duggan gave an update to Forum members of the actions from the Noise & Track Monitoring System (NTMS) demonstration meeting back in March 2010. Ms. Duggan explained that following the last Environmental Sub Group meeting and subsequent NTMS demonstration, the Airport is still looking into how best to use information from the NTMS for reporting in a manner that is useful and meaningful – given the abundance of information that the system is capable of generating. The Airport is looking firstly at using the NTMS to report on exceptions to Noise Abatement Procedures.

Mr. Wright queried how much had been invested in the installation of the NTMS. Mr Ambrose confirmed that the Airport invested approximately £150,000 in the NTMS itself and a further £3.7 million in a new radar system that was essential to the proper functioning of the NTMS.

Mr. McNair stated that he had read in a report by the Aviation Environment Federation that UK airports are failing to meet the requirements under the EU Environmental Noise Directive. Mr. Ambrose confirmed that the Airport is guided by, and is in compliance with, UK policy guidance set out in the Air Transport White Paper and the noise management requirements set out in the Planning Agreement.

Post meeting fact: *George Best Belfast City Airport as a designated competent authority has fulfilled the requirements to date under the Environmental Noise Directive. GBBCA have produced first round noise maps and a Noise Action Plan for the period 2008 – 2013. The GBBCA Noise Action Plan was adopted by the Minister for the Environment on 22nd June 2010 and is available for viewing on the DOE website.*

GBBCA will continue to engage with the DOE and other competent authorities through the Northern Ireland Environmental Noise Directive Steering Group on the implementation of actions and the development of future plans following the required five yearly reviews of the noise maps. It will also work with the NIENDSG to set the framework for the identification and assessment of potential noise management areas and quiet areas.

9. SEATS FOR SALE

Mr. Ambrose gave Forum members some background information on the matter of the 'seats for sale' restriction at Belfast City Airport. The seats for sale restriction was originally imposed due to capacity restrictions of the old airport terminal building which was estimated to be 1.5 million passengers. The 1.5 million passenger capacity of the terminal and the then assumed average aircraft occupancy (load factor) of 50% would have allowed a total of 3 million seats for sale – thus 1.5 million seats for sale "from" the Airport (as per wording in the Planning Agreement).

In 2004, the Airport was conscious that it would breach the seats for sale limit and a review of the Planning Agreement was subsequently prompted.

At this point, the Department of the Environment and the NI Affairs Select Committee reviewed the matter of the seats for sale and concluded that the restriction was not a valid or suitable way to manage the environmental impact of airport activity. In 2006, the Examination In Public (EIP) panel recommended that the 'seats for sale' restriction should be retained in the short term and reviewed once a Noise & Track Monitoring System was put in place and was functioning, but that the cap should be raised to 2 million seats for sale. The Planning Agreement was amended in 2008 in this respect.

The Airport has now fulfilled the recommendations of the EIP in terms of the Noise & Track Monitoring System requirements and as such is seeking to remove the seats for sale limit.

It is the Airport's view that it is an irrational constraint given that the Airport growth is capped by the 48,000 Air Transport Movements (ATMs) per annum limit. However, the Airport is likely to exceed the seats for sale limit even at an estimated 43,000 ATMs.

The Chairman advised Forum members that he has received a letter from Planning Service stating that the Minister for the Environment has indicated that he is minded to agree to the removal of the seats for sale restriction but that in the interest of openness and transparency wishes to seek the views of a number of bodies including the Airport Forum.

Mr. McNamee expressed dissatisfaction with this decision saying that it is the only control measure that residents have against further expansion and the operation of larger aircraft at the Airport.

Mr. McNamee and Cllr. Newton queried if the removal of seats for sale would impact on the aircraft type mix operational at Belfast City Airport? Mr. Ambrose states that there could be some change in the aircraft type mix but it is not the intention of Belfast City Airport to operate 48,000 jet aircraft nor would the Northern Ireland market support this.

Mr. Walker stated that the cap on ATMs is a more appropriate control as well as a Leq 16 hr control contour.

Mr. Walker queried if the seats for sale removal would result in a notable increase in noise. Mr. Ambrose stated that as part of the runway extension proposal, the Airport has developed a noise contour based on a realistic growth forecast. While there is expected to be a modest increase in the area under the 63 Leq 16 hr contour, there would still be no properties that fall within it.

Mr. Walker commented that it is not in the best interest of environmental sustainability to have aircraft operating that are not full to capacity which can be the case under the seats for sale restriction.

Mr. Ambrose stated that there have been significant technical advancements in aircraft in terms of noise mitigation since the seats for sale' restriction was first imposed. Furthermore, the Airport is subject to other noise restrictions such as those under Chapter 3 of the Aerodromes (Noise Restrictions, Rules and Procedures) Regulations 2003.

Cllr. Mullaghan said that Belfast City Council has been designated as a separate consultee so will not be expressing the views through the Airport Forum.

Mr. Wright stated that Holywood Residents Association has deemed the seats for sale limit to be irrelevant and as such would be in favour of it being removed. He requested that any Forum member wishing to object to the removal of the limit to put this in writing to the Forum Chairman. It was agreed by all that the deadline for receipt of comments should be 2nd August 2010.

Action: Forum Members

Cllr. Mullaghan requested for the documented evidence justifying the imposition of the 'Seats for Sale' restriction be circulated to Forum Members.

Action: Forum Secretary

The Chairman advised that he would write to Planning Service, advising that the Forum did not reach a consensus and reporting the various views put forward.

Action: Forum Chairman

10. SUB GROUPS: CONFIRMING MEMBERSHIP

A note was sent out to Forum members following the last Forum meeting requesting members to send their preferences for Sub Group membership to the Forum Secretary. Taking the responses into account it is now possible to confirm Sub Group membership as follows:

Environmental Sub Group:

Sub Group Chairperson – tbc

Mr. Alan Crowe – Forum Chairman

Mr. John McNair – Marmont & District Community Association

Mr. Terry Hoey – Palmerston Residents Association

Mr. Sean Coulter – Department for Regional Development (observer)

Economic and Service Sub Group:

Sub Group Chairperson – tbc

Mr. Alan Walker – Forum Vice Chairman

Mr. Terry Hoey – Palmerston Residents Association

Mrs. Lisa Toland – Belfast City Council

Mr. Gordon Wright – Holywood Residents' Association

All Forum members were in agreement.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Crowe advised Forum members that he attended the annual meeting of the UK Airport Consultative Committee Liaison Group in London City Airport on 2nd – 3rd June 2010.

There were two main points for discussion:

- PRM: an update on how well the new arrangements under the European PRM Regulation are operating at UK airports and any outstanding issues.
- Surface access: an update on recent developments/issues and the latest figures the modal split.

The Forum Secretary provided a summary on these two points for contribution to the discussion.

The matter of the preservation of slots for domestic services at Heathrow Airport was another issue that was discussed given the recent decision by the UK Government to scrap proposals for a third runway at Heathrow.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Airport Forum will be held on Wednesday 17th November 2010 at 19:00 hrs in the Airport Conference Centre.

Signed: 

ALAN CROWE (Forum Chairman)

Date: 17th November 2010

AC/ld