

GEORGE BEST BELFAST CITY AIRPORT FORUM

Minutes of Meeting No.66

Held on Wednesday, 14th March 2012 in Conference Room 1 at 7.00pm

Attendees:

Mr Alan Walker	Deputy Chairman
Dr Daniel V. McCaughan	Cultra Residents' Association
Dr Colm McNamee	Park Road and District Residents' Association
Mr Terry Hoey	Palmerston Residents' Association
Cllr Adam Newton	Belfast City Council
Cllr Tom Haire	Belfast City Council
Cllr John Montgomery	North Down Borough Council
Mrs Julie Allen	Belfast City Council
Capt. Ian Ewer	Base Captain Bmi
Mr Mark Doherty	Belfast Harbour Commissioners
Mr Scott Kennerley	Northern Ireland Consumer Council
Mr John Moore	Belfast Chamber of Commerce
Mr Brian Ambrose	George Best Belfast City Airport

Observers:

Mr David McCullough	Department for Regional Development
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In attendance:

Miss Laura Duggan	Forum Secretary
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1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

Mr Alan Crowe	Chairman
Mrs Laura McCorry	Northern Ireland Tourist Board
Cllr James McKerrow	North Down Borough Council
Mr Andrew Irvine	Belfast City Centre Management
Mrs Lisa Toland	Belfast City Council
Mr Gordon Wright	Hollywood Residents' Association
Mr Christopher McFerran	Helen's Bay & Crawfordsburn Residents' Association

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

The Deputy Chairman welcomed all present to the meeting.

2. MINUTES OF THE FORUM MEETING HELD ON 23RD NOVEMBER 2011

A few Members noted that they did not receive a copy of the last meeting minutes. It was agreed that the Forum Secretary would resend the minutes following the meeting and request a delivery receipt.

Action: Forum Secretary

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

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Miss Duggan advised Members that a copy of the Community Fund annual report had been circulated with the last meeting minutes.

3.2 Miss Duggan advised Members that the Landside Operations Manager had been in touch with Mr Hudson from Translink and had extended an invitation to him to come to a meeting at the Airport to discuss the opportunities for a direct bus service between Bangor and BCA.

3.3 Mr Ambrose advised Members that the Airport had considered the request from Mr Hoey for complaint statistics to be made available on the Airport's website. It was decided that it was sufficient for the Airport to share this information with the Airport Forum and for it to be disseminated in this way.

3.4 Miss Duggan advised Members that the vacancy on the Environmental Sub Group for a community group representative had been filled by Dr McCaughan from Cultra Residents' Association. Dr McCaughan attended the last meeting of the Group on 20th February.

3.5 Miss Duggan advised Members that the matter of the Forum review would be dealt with as an agenda item later in the meeting.

In relation to the Airport's response to the UK Aviation Policy Framework scoping document, Dr McCaughan queried if the matter of 'double take' with respect to Air Passenger Duty (APD) had been raised in the Airport's response to this consultation. Mr Ambrose said that this had been addressed more specifically in the Airport's verbal evidence at the NI Affairs Committee inquiry into APD.

Mr Kennerley advised Members that the Consumer Council had highlighted the matter of 'double take' from an APD perspective in its response both to the DfT's UK Aviation Policy Framework scoping document and the HM Treasury consultation on the Reform of APD. Both of these response documents are available for viewing on the Consumer Council's website. According to Mr Kennerley, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee has recommended that air tax bands A and B be merged and a zero duty rate applied to Northern Ireland on the basis that Northern Ireland is at a distinct disadvantage as the only 'island' region in the UK. This mirrors the Consumer Council's position of calling for APD to be reduced or removed in line with the Republic of Ireland Air Travel Tax (currently 3 euro). Mr Kennerley advised Members that the

Consumer Council had also given evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on the matter of APD and its disproportionate impact on the Northern Ireland consumer.

4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Mr Ambrose delivered an update to Members on the following:

4.1 Capital Investment:

- Reconfiguration works of the terminal forecourt: this work has now been completed.
- Facilities for UK Border Agency (customs and immigration) to meet their requirements for segregation of domestic and international arriving passengers: This work has commenced and is due to be completed by mid-September 2012.
- The Airport has invested £250,000 in a new Instrument Landing System (ILS) for arriving aircraft on Runway 04.

4.2 Route Development:

BMI Baby is to commence the operation of six 'sun' routes in the next couple of weeks to the following destinations: Malaga, Alicante, Palma, Mahon, Faro, and Ibiza. Initial bookings on these routes have thus far exceeded BMI Baby's expectations.

4.3 Sale of BMI:

BMI are in the process of changing ownership to IAG. The deal is expected to close within the next few weeks. With respect to the BMI domestic service to London Heathrow (LHR), the Airport is optimistic that the connection to BCA will be retained because of its importance to the region as a key link for Northern Ireland to the UK mainland and as a feeder for onward travel (approximately 35% of all journeys). BCA is thankful for the lobbying carried out by local elected representatives to protect the BCA to LHR service. The fate of BMI Baby is less clear but at the moment there are two potential buyers for this arm of the business.

Cllr. Montgomery queried if it is likely for the BMI brand to be retained following its sale and if the number of services operating per day between BCA and LHR is likely to be affected. Mr Ambrose responded to say that it is unlikely that the BMI brand will be retained following its sale as it would be unusual to do so. It is difficult to say at this stage what the impact will be on the BCA – LHR service. Mr Ambrose will keep Members updated with developments in due course.

4.4 NI 2012:

Mr Ambrose advised Members that the Airport was working closely with NITB on the promotional activity around the various planned events for Northern Ireland in 2012/13 including the Irish Open golf tournament in Portrush which is expected to draw approximately 100,000 visitors.

DETI have launched a co-operative marketing plan with Tourism Ireland to promote Northern Ireland as a tourist destination in Great Britain and the Airport is optimistic of the impact that this will have on the levels of inbound tourists into the region.

Dr McCaughan queried if the Airport had considered taking advantage of technological advancements such as the BCA iPhone App for promoting tourism initiatives. Mr Ambrose advised Members that the Airport had become more active on social media in recent times and have so far used these tools for the promotion of new routes, of events such as the MTV Music Awards and for the promotion of offers by the various onsite business partners. Miss Duggan advised Members that the details of the Airport's social media links were included in the last meeting minutes.

5. 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 2010-2011/2011-12

Mr Ambrose highlighted to Members that there had been a 20% reduction in flights after 21:30 hours in 2011 compared with the previous year and flights after 21:30 hours represented less than 1% of all flights operating at the Airport in 2011.

Dr McCaughan queried if the Airport had received many concerns about noise from aircraft engine testing as it was not reflected in complaint statistics (i.e. one complaint in 2011). Mr Ambrose advised Members that engine testing was not such an issue for local residents since the re-siting of the Airport terminal. Most engine testing, including high powered runs, takes place on the north side of the airfield away from residential areas. Engine testing is also prohibited between the hours of 22:30 and 06:00 hours.

Captain Ewer advised Members that the requirement for engine testing on the Airbus had been reduced in recent years due to advancements with the aircraft computer systems capable of resolving many technical issues.

6. REPORT FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL SUB GROUP

The Report from the Environmental Sub Group from the last meeting on 20th February 2012 that had been circulated in advance of the meeting was noted by Members.

7. FORUM REVIEW

At the last Forum meeting, it was agreed that a review of the Forum should be carried out to evaluate how well it is currently performing and determine if there are any aspects that can be

improved. For this purpose, Miss Duggan prepared a number of starting points to aide discussion at the meeting, as follows:

7.1 Membership: is there a suitable balance between all stakeholders?

A discussion took place on the current Forum membership. Mr Moore commented that there had been a big improvement in the balance of interests in recent times with the inclusion of more representatives from the business community.

Mr Kennerley said that it is important for the Forum to remain flexible in terms of membership to take account of changing needs/demands.

Cllr. Montgomery suggested that given the Belfast City Centre Manager (Mr Irvine) had now joined the Forum it might be beneficial to also have his counterpart in Bangor Town Centre Management on the Forum. Concern was expressed, however, that the Forum would become too large and as such would it be possible for Belfast City Centre Management to link up with Bangor Town Centre Management in some way to represent both parties' interests?

There was a general agreement that the current Forum membership represents a good balance of stakeholder interests.

7.2 Forum Reports: consider usefulness & timeliness. Are there other reports that would be (more) beneficial?

Mr Kennerley said that he would like to receive more information that would demonstrate how the Airport is performing for the passenger / consumer – for example, the number of passenger delays by hour, two hours, etc. It was agreed that Mr Kennerley should send a request to the Forum Secretary outlining the information that the Consumer Council would like to see and the Forum Secretary would then determine whether it could be provided by the Airport.

Action: Mr Kennerley

A number of Members felt that it would be beneficial for Mr Ambrose to provide some commentary on the Forum Reports when they are circulated. Furthermore, the Forum Reports should be taken as read at the meeting unless there was anything 'exceptional' that needed to be highlighted to Members at the meeting. It was agreed that this would be done for future meetings.

Action: Mr Ambrose

It was discussed and agreed that a summary of CR activity be appended with the Forum Reports when they are circulated.

Action: Forum Secretary

Mr Moore queried if the Airport could provide information demonstrating the contribution that the Airport makes to economic development in the region – for example the split of business vs. leisure passengers and inbound vs. outbound visitors. It was noted that it might not be possible to source all of this information but that some of this information should be available from the CAA passenger surveys or from NITB who are represented on the Forum.

7.3 Administration: consider current method of communication / frequency of communications / ease of raising agenda items, etc.

It was agreed that email was the preferable method of communication between the Forum Secretary and Members. As discussed previously, however, it might be beneficial for the Forum Secretary to request a delivery receipt with all email communications to Members to ensure that they have been received.

Members requested if it would be possible for the Forum Reports to be combined into one file for ease of reading. The Forum Secretary said that she would investigate if this could be done.

Action: Forum Secretary

7.4 Meetings: consider frequency / start time / duration. Would it be beneficial to limit no. of agenda items? Are the regular agenda items still beneficial? Is the level of technical input at meetings sufficient?

Members agreed that they were happy with the frequency and start time of the meetings. It was agreed, however, that the meetings tended to run on longer than desired but that changes that have been agreed as part of this review should help with this issue.

Members agreed that the technical input from Captain Ewer BMI Base Captain was particularly welcomed.

Mr Ambrose proposed the idea of having one major agenda item for discussion at each meeting, and where necessary, to invite a representative from the Airport to deliver a presentation to the Forum on that topic. Members welcomed this proposal.

A number of initial agenda items were agreed, as follows:

- Airport Safety Management System
- CR Action Plan and Initiatives
- Aviation Policy (e.g. CAA Bill)

Mr Ambrose requested that Members put forward additional suggestions for discussion topics in writing to the Forum Secretary.

Action: Forum Members

7.5 Minutes: consider in terms of accuracy / level of detail, etc.

It was agreed that the minutes have been a satisfactory record of the meeting to date.

7.6 Member Support: is there anything that could help to improve support for Members to enhance their understanding and facilitate full and active participation in Forum meetings?

A number of new Members raised the point that it took them some time to become familiar with the Airport operations and get to grips with the specific terminology and various acronyms used in association with the Airport. As such, it was agreed that it would be beneficial if the Airport could produce some form of induction for new Members such as an Airport tour and a glossary of terms for new Members. Mr Ambrose agreed that the Airport could certainly facilitate this.

8. CAA CONSULTATION ON PASSENGER REPRESENTATION AND COMPLAINT HANDLING

Miss Duggan gave an update to members on the outcome of the CAA's consultation (August 2011) on four options for a Consumer Panel, as follows:

1. Not setting up a consumer panel (no cost option).
2. A small panel to provide expert advice on consumer issues. It would be part of CAA and CAA would set its agenda.
3. A panel that would act as a "critical friend" to the CAA with "internal independence" and a part-time paid Chair. No research budget.
4. Public facing, campaigning panel with a research budget, its own website and an annual report publication.

Having reviewed the responses to its consultation, the CAA has decided to set up a consumer panel in line with Option 3. It was recognised that there is a need for a panel to support the CAA in ensuring that its regulation takes proper account of consumers' interests. However, the CAA was mindful of the need to keep costs to a reasonable level and was not convinced that the higher costs required for Option 4 were justified.

However, for the panel to add real value to the CAA's decision making processes, it was considered essential that the panel would have sufficient resources to form a genuinely independent view and for it to develop effective relationships with industry and other consumer organisations. As such, a part-time paid Chair was considered justified. The CAA has commenced recruitment for the position of the Chair of the Consumer Panel.

9. FORUM MEMBERSHIP

Miss Duggan advised Members that she had received confirmation from Inverary Community Centre Committee that they do not wish to retain their seat on the Forum. Their decision is due to a change in composition of the Committee and other commitments that they now have. As such, there is now a vacant seat available on the Airport Forum for an East Belfast community

group. Miss Duggan requested Members' permission to commence a further recruitment process for a replacement East Belfast group and Members agreed that they were happy for this to be done.

Action: Forum Secretary

Cllr. Newton advised that he would be able to provide the Forum Secretary with a list of potentially eligible East Belfast community groups as this information is held by Belfast City Council.

Action: Cllr. Newton

10. AOB

Cllr. Montgomery queried what the status is with the planning application to extend the runway at BCA. Mr Ambrose responded to say that the application was now in its fourth year with the last addendum (3rd Addendum) being submitted in December 2010. A Public Inquiry was to be held subsequent to this but as of yet, no date has been set. With the recent changes in operations (commencement of BMI Baby) some of the information in the 3rd Addendum will now be outdated and a further Addendum may be required before a Public Inquiry can take place.

The priority for the Airport at present is the close out of the now very lengthy planning process to remove the seats for sale restriction on the Airport but that the Airport will be making a decision very shortly on the next steps with regards to the runway extension application.

Dr McCaughan queried if the Airport had a position on the EU proposals intended to minimise fatigue amongst airline pilots. Mr Ambrose responded to say that this is primarily an airline issue.

11. DATE FOR 2012 MEETINGS

Proposed dates:

- Wednesday 20th June
- Wednesday 14th November

Signed:



Date:

20-6-12.

Alan Walker (Deputy Chairman)

AW/ld