

## GEORGE BEST BELFAST CITY AIRPORT FORUM

Minutes of Meeting No. 68

Held on Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2012 in Conference Room 1 at 7.00pm

### Attendees:

Mr Alan Walker	Deputy Chairman
Cllr Tom Haire	Belfast City Council
Mrs Julie Allen	Belfast City Council
Cllr John Montgomery	North Down Borough Council
Mr Mark Doherty	Belfast Harbour Commissioners
Mr Scott Kennerley	Northern Ireland Consumer Council
Mr Gordon Wright	Hollywood Residents' Association
Mr Christopher McFerran	Helen's Bay & Crawfordsburn Residents' Association
Dr Colm McNamee	Park Road and District Residents' Association
Mr Terry Hoey	Palmerstown Residents Association
Mr Stephen Finlay	Northern Ireland Tourist Board
Mr John Moore	Belfast Chamber of Commerce
Mr Brian Ambrose	George Best Belfast City Airport

### Observers:

Dr Andrew Grieve	Department for Regional Development
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### In attendance:

Mr Jonny Currie	East Belfast Community Development Agency
Mrs Michelle Hatfield	George Best Belfast City Airport
Miss Laura Duggan	Forum Secretary

## 1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

Mrs Lisa Toland	Belfast City Council
Cllr. Adam Newton	Belfast City Council
Capt. Ian Ewer	Captain British Airways
Mr Andrew Irvine	Belfast City Centre Management

Mr Walker related to Forum Members that given the takeover of BMI by British Airways, BMI's base captain at GBBCA and Forum representative, Captain Ian Ewer, has taken on a new role as line Captain for British Airways on the A-320 Fleet and would be based in London Heathrow. As a result, he would no longer be able to attend Forum meetings. Mr Walker expressed his gratitude to Captain Ewer for his significant contribution, in particular his technical input, to the Forum for many years and wished him the best in his future endeavours. Mr Walker requested

the permission from Forum Members to convey this message to Captain Ewer in writing on the Forum's behalf. Members were in agreement with this.

**Action:** Mr Walker

Mr Ambrose advised Members that the Airport will endeavour to secure attendance by a representative from at least one base airline at each Forum meeting in 2013.

**Action:** Mr Ambrose

## **2. CONFIRMATION OF EAST BELFAST COMMUNITY GROUP MEMBERSHIP**

The Deputy Chair advised members that the recruitment process for an East Belfast community group to take up the available seat on the Forum had resulted in one application being received from East Belfast Community Development Agency (EBCDA). As such, it was not necessary to convene a meeting of the application review panel. However, the application and supporting information was checked to ensure that it met with the application criteria and then forwarded to the panel members for consideration. Panel members were satisfied with the application and on that basis the Deputy Chair would like to recommend that EBCDA be offered the available seat. Members were asked to consider this recommendation at the meeting and no objections were raised.

The representative from EBCDA, Mr Jonny Currie, was asked to join the meeting.

## **WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS**

The Deputy Chair welcomed all present to the meeting including Mr Currie and Mr Stephen Finlay from Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) who has recently taken over from Mrs Laura McCorry as the NITB representative.

## **3. MINUTES OF THE FORUM MEETING HELD ON 20<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2012**

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

## **4. MATTERS ARISING**

4.1 The Forum Secretary noted that written commentary on the Airport Statistics had been provided by Mr Ambrose at the time of circulating.

4.2 Mr Walker advised Members that a copy of the recording of the Enterprise Trade and Investment Committee meeting from 24<sup>th</sup> May 2012 had been obtained. Mr Walker advised that on listening it was clear that the Operations Director for GBBCA had not intended to misrepresent Members on the Forum but that for the sake of clarity, Mr Walker has written to the Chair of the Committee, Mr Alban Maginness MLA, to advise that there were Members both

for and against the Airport's proposals to modify its Planning Agreement. A copy of this letter could be made available to Members on request to the Forum Secretary.

**Action:** Forum Members / Forum Secretary

On this basis, Mr Walker asked if Members were happy to close the matter. Members were in agreement with this.

4.3 Mr Ambrose advised that the query from the previous meeting regarding the number of extensions on the Birmingham route will be covered under Agenda item 7 – Airport Statistics.

4.4 Mr Kennerley gave Members an update on matters of interest relating to the Consumer Council's work, as follows:

- EU level review of slot allocation: The Consumer Council has taken this as an opportunity to lobby for secured access to slots at Heathrow for NI services which has been picked up at MEP level.
- EU Air Passenger Rights Day: Mr Kennerley thanked Mr Ambrose and Mrs Davis for facilitating the Consumer Council's access to the Airport on the day. 300 people responded to their online survey on the awareness of passenger rights. A report on the survey findings will be made available on its website in due course.

## **5. PRESENTATION ON CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY AT GBBCA**

Mrs Hatfield, Director of Corporate Responsibility at GBBCA, delivered a presentation to Members on CR activity.

A discussion took place following the presentation on the High Flyers Apprenticeship programme soon to be launched by GBBCA. As part of this programme, at least 10 young people [aged 16-24 years] or unemployed individuals from the local community will be given the opportunity to gain on the job experience or an apprenticeship linked to a training qualification at the Airport.

Mr Ambrose advised Members that the programme had not been formally launched yet and that further information should be available to circulate in the near future.

**Action:** Forum Secretary

Mr Hoey queried if the programme would require applicants to have any prior formal qualifications such as GCSEs. Mr Ambrose responded to say that this generally would not be a requirement of the programme.

Mr Hoey commended the Airport for this programme and Mr Wright agreed saying that it would help to inspire young people and engage them which is something that is very much needed in the local community.

Mr Currie queried if the partnership with Macmillan Cancer was the Airport's first partnership with a charity. Mrs Hatfield responded that aside from the Community Fund, the Airport has for a number of years engaged with a charity which is supported through various employee initiatives including a regular charity lunch, and so forth. The Airport can be approached directly regarding a charity partnership whereas there is an application process for projects that are seeking sponsorship from its Community Fund.

*[Further details regarding the Community Fund can be found on the Airport's website: [www.belfastcityairport.com](http://www.belfastcityairport.com) or by contacting the Community Fund Co-ordinator at [communityfund@belfastcityairport.com](mailto:communityfund@belfastcityairport.com)]*

## **6. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

Mr Ambrose delivered an update to Members on the following:

### **6.1 BMI / BMI Baby**

- Since the demise of BMI Baby, GBBCA has been working hard to replace this business. Following a competitive tender exercise, GBBCA was pleased to have secured Aer Lingus's Northern Ireland operations. Flights commenced on 28<sup>th</sup> October with two key routes – London Heathrow and London Gatwick – with three flights daily in each direction. The summer schedule, which begins from the end of March 2013, will operate daily flights to two sun destinations – Malaga and Faro – in addition to the three daily rotations to London Heathrow and Gatwick airports.
- GBBCA was also successful in the tender process for the British Airways' London Heathrow service following its takeover of BMI. British Airways has increased the frequency of this service for the winter 2012 schedule with an additional flight each day, bringing the total to seven rotations.
- Flybe's operation also continues to be strong at GBBCA. London Gatwick is one of Flybe's most popular services has seen increased capacity. Additional flights have been added for East Midlands and Birmingham, Manchester has been upgraded to a jet service.

### **6.2 Capital Investment**

- **Instrument Landing System:** ILS installation has just been completed at a cost of £2 million. This in addition to the investment in a secondary radar at the Airport a few years ago. Both represent considerable enhancements to the Airport's navigational aids and thus the Airport's long term resilience.
- **International Arrivals:** the opening is imminent of the recently constructed International Arrivals. The objective of this project is to prevent the mixing of domestic and international passengers as required from a security perspective. The project, costing circa £3 million, complements the recent terminal enhancements and provides a bright and modern gateway for visitors coming into Northern Ireland.
- **Aer Lingus:** additional accommodation has been provided for the Aer Lingus team.

### **6.3 Major NI Events**

In June of this year, GBBCA welcomed the Olympic flame. A small reception was hosted at the Airport in honour of this event. The 2012 Irish Open brought many inward visitors to NI and helped to raise its profile at an international level.

### **6.4 Planning**

The process to remove the Seats for Sale limit at the Airport is in its 9<sup>th</sup> year. A Public Inquiry was due to be held on the matter in November. However, a short time before a pre-Inquiry meeting in September, requests for additional information were made which resulted in a year delay to the process. It is likely that a Public Inquiry will now be held in the autumn of 2013 with a decision being delivered in the spring of 2014.

### **6.5 CR Activity**

A CR Summary for Q3 2012 has been provided with the meeting papers with further detail covered by Mrs Hatfield in her earlier presentation.

Mr Ambrose accepted questions from Forum Members regarding the Chief Executive's report.

Mr Hoey advised Members that he had been made aware that some car hire companies have been imposing hefty deposit conditions on international passengers and queried if such a practice would take place at GBBCA. Mr Ambrose responded that he was not aware that car hire companies differentiate between domestic and international passengers but that he will confirm this and report back to the Forum.

#### **Action: Mr Ambrose**

Cllr. Montgomery queried what was meant by tendering for the British Airways and Aer Lingus business. Mr Ambrose responded that GBBCA had to engage in a tendering exercise with Belfast International Airport and were considered favourably against various criteria set out by the airlines.

Cllr Montgomery queried if Aer Lingus would be offering any other European routes in the near future. Mr Ambrose responded that he was confident of further expansion into Europe.

Mr Moore queried if there were any plans to develop the rail connection to opposite the terminal building at GBBCA. Mr Ambrose responded that while GBBCA would support such a development, the existing rail network and frequency of service it unlikely to achieve the usage required to support the investment. It is not a very attractive option on this basis. The bus service is probably the preferred public transport option, delivering a 20 minute frequency at the moment which could be increased depending on passenger take-up.

Mr Kennerley queried if the planned industrial strike by Aer Lingus is likely to affect flights at GBBCA. Mr Ambrose responded that he did not believe it would affect the Northern Ireland operation.

## **7. 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 2011-12

Cllr. Haire queried why there had been an increase in the number of complaints in 2012 compared with the previous year. Mr Ambrose advised that there is a tendency for spikes in complaints to occur when there is planning matters under consideration. Mr Ambrose also drew Members attention to the fact that the overall number of complainants remains fairly low.

Mr Moore queried the reason for the number of complaints received from the Ormeau and Annadale areas. Mr Ambrose advised that these areas are under the flight path and therefore more likely to be disturbed by aircraft noise. The majority of the complaints were about flights after 21:30 hours and this could be for flights from 21:31 onwards. Once again it is worth noting that the number of complainants for this area is considerably less than the total number of complaints received.

## **8. REPORT FROM THE ENVIRONMENTAL SUB GROUP**

The Report from the Environmental Sub Group on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2012 that had been circulated in advance of the meeting was noted by Members.

## **9. DRAFT AVIATION POLICY FRAMEWORK**

Mr Grieve advised that the stakeholder consultation event hosted by the Department for Regional Development on the Draft Aviation Policy Framework on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> October was one of the best attended in the UK.

The key messages that came out of the consultation event were as follows:

- Missed opportunities – regional differences highlighted in the scoping document had not been followed through into the draft policy framework
- Competition with Ireland
- Hub access a necessity for NI services
- Adequate balance between economic and environmental considerations and improvements required in the planning regime
- Air Passenger Duty and its disproportionate impact on NI passengers

Mr Grieve advised that the DfT were receptive to the feedback received at this event.

The DRD Minister (with the agreement of the DETI, DoE and DFP Ministers) responded to the consultation on 7th November 2012.

A discussion took place on the draft Forum response prepared by the Deputy Chair on behalf of Forum Members which had been circulated in the advance of the meeting. Mr Walker advised that whilst an extension had originally been granted by DfT for the Forum response to 7<sup>th</sup> November, it was challenging to seek agreement from all Members without a Forum meeting taking place. On this basis, it had been decided to hold off on submitting the final response until confirmation could be sought from Members that they were satisfied with the response at this meeting.

Mr Walker said that due to the fact that it would not be possible to obtain a consensus on a significant number of issues, particularly environmental issues such as noise, he had endeavoured to focus on aspects of the draft framework for which there was likely to be a degree of common ground across Members, while trying to avoid the response being overly anodyne.

Mr Walker sought views from Members on the draft response. Following the suggestion from Cllr Montgomery, it was agreed by Members that the response be amended to highlight the following issues:

- Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK to have a land border with another EU state which has not been recognised in the draft policy.
- Air Passenger Duty often provides double taxation on NI passengers who have a higher propensity to fly for geographical reasons.
- Regional connectivity must be secured to maintain the benefits to the wider UK economy and as such, peak slots at hub airports such as Heathrow, should not be restricted in any way, for example through a requirement to use larger aircraft.

It was agreed by Members that the Forum response to the Draft Aviation Policy Framework should be submitted to the DfT once these changes had been made.

Mr Kennerley advised that the Consumer Council had responded directly to the consultation. In its response, the Consumer Council highlighted issues such as: the disproportionate impact of Air Passenger Duty on NI passengers; slot access to hub airports in the UK for regional services; the unique status of Northern Ireland and how aviation is of *strategic national interest* in NI and; the importance of a surface transport strategy that better takes account of access to airports and other key transport hubs. It was agreed that the Consumer Council response would be circulated with the Forum minutes.

## **10. FORUM REVIEW**

The Forum Secretary gave an update on changes that had resulted following the Forum Review in March of this year, as follows:

- Forum Reports now collated into one file for ease of reading
- commentary is provided by the Chief Executive on Forum Reports at the time of circulation
- a report on CR activity is now provided by the Airport with the Forum reports
- presentations to be delivered to Members on key areas of interest (e.g. security, CR) to be delivered by GBBCA
- tour of the Airport to be arranged for new Members

Mr Walker expressed thanks to GBBCA for continuing to resource the Forum secretariat and to the Forum Secretary for her contribution to the coordination and administration of the Forum during the year.

## 11. AOB

Mr Ambrose thanked Mr Walker for acting-up in the role of Forum Chair following the untimely passing of Mr Crowe. Mr Ambrose said that it was necessary at this stage, however, to formalise the position of Forum Chair. Mr Ambrose advised Members that Mr Walker has indicated that he would be willing to take up the position but that an appointment process needed to be undertaken to as per the Forum Constitution. This would involve giving Members the opportunity to put forward nominations for the position of Chair and Deputy Chair. Mr Ambrose proposed that the Forum Secretary would write to Members advising them of the appointment criteria for the role and to request nominations from Members. Members agreed that they were happy with this approach.

**Action:** Forum Secretary

## 12. DATE FOR 2013 MEETINGS

Proposed dates:

- Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> March
- Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> June
- Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November

Signed:



Date: 27<sup>th</sup> March 2013

Alan Walker (Forum Chairman)  
AW/ld