

Comments on the Aviation Connectivity and the Economy

Discussion Paper 02

The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) is a professional association representing local authority Strategic Directors who manage some of the most pressing issues facing the UK today. ADEPT membership is drawn from around 56 local authorities across the United Kingdom.

The expertise of ADEPT members, their vision and drive is fundamental in the handling of issues that affect all our lives. Operating at the strategic tier of local government they are responsible for delivering public services that primarily relate to the physical environment and the economy, but which have a significant impact on all aspects of the nation's well-being.

We collaborate and have dialogue with Government, LEPs, the business community and others to understand their transport needs.

ADEPT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Airports Commission's recent Discussion Paper on Aviation Connectivity and the Economy. The Commission has posed the question as to whether or not we agree with the definition of Connectivity presented in the paper. To us in Local Government the term "connectivity" can often reflect a wider range of factors which relate more to the notion of "accessibility" rather than "mobility" which can lead to different solutions. This means we are more focused on outcomes that can be achieved through sustainable interventions and not just more of the same. Sometimes, under this definition, connectivity can be achieved through new digital technologies, such as Superfast Broadband rather than assuming travel is the essential solution. The importance of this view to Local Authorities is that we tend to look at connectivity in a more holistic way covering all modes of transport and not just a single sector in isolation. In other words, we look at the whole journey effect, rather than just one element of it. In this context, we are hugely supportive of improving surface access to and from airports in the UK and consider this as a key priority in supporting Local and National economies and our competitiveness with the rest of the world.

However, whilst we recognise the value that traditional connectivity to and from world wide markets through our major international airports can play in supporting economic regeneration, we remain concerned that this can distort the spatial distribution of economic regeneration in the country around a limited number of key clusters in close proximity to those facilities. Therefore, we need to ensure that there is some balance between the major international airports and those located at a regional level in such a way that economic activity is more fairly distributed. As part of this balance, the issue of where runway capacity is located is much less important if regional access to that capacity is enhanced and encouraged. We need to ensure that flights from the regions are able to connect to the rest of the world via the major airports to help support a broader range of local economies that are spread more equitably around the country. This can also help support wider policy objectives such as those relating to road and rail traffic congestion and the environment as part of our holistic view of connectivity. This would particularly be the case in the hotspot location of the South- East of the country.

With this in mind, we do not feel that the discussion paper pays sufficient attention to the role that regional airports can play in supporting aviation connectivity, and hence more local economies, and is too heavily focussed on international travel only. Regional airports serve local communities and meet the needs of both business and leisure travellers by offering a broad range of high frequency services from convenient local airports. Moreover, because of the nature of the service, they are able to use aircraft that can minimise the impact on the environment and CO2 reduction, and can also reduce traffic congestion by optimising internal domestic flights. Unfortunately, this is not being helped by the increase in APD which discriminates against domestic aviation because it is in effect a form of departure tax and domestic customers would be paying twice. This we view as a barrier to growth.