

LONDON SOUTHEND AIRPORT

Response to the Airports Commission's Discussion Paper 06 **Utilisation of the UK's Existing Airport Capacity**

Introduction

This response is from London Southend Airport of the Stobart Group to the Airports Commission's Discussion Paper 06: Utilisation of the UK's Existing Airport Capacity. It concentrates on responses to the questions relating to Chapter 6, but also makes some general comments in relation to other matters raised in the paper.

Chapter 1

The analysis showing the reduction in links from non-London airports to London airports and the commentary is generally correct. However, Table 1.1 includes an error as it shows an at least weekly service to Southend from Leeds Bradford. This should be from Jersey (the row above). The other data from 2012 and 2013 is correct, but since then there have been further changes, with services from Newquay started and ended from Belfast and Edinburgh.

Airlines can, of course, start and end new routes with relative ease, and the evidence from the past is not necessarily a good guide to the future. Over the medium term, without new runway capacity, it is likely that there will be a further squeeze at major airports, but this may allow smaller airports such as Southend to meet the demand, using smaller aircraft, with short and simple airport processing, and good access to the region and parts of London. Flybe's new services to France, Belgium and Holland, show how a different airline model using franchised services can be successful.

Chapter 2

Although a London Airport, Southend, has a business model which may provide an example of best practice suitable for non-London airports. This model seeks to provide a simple, one-stop service for airlines who are prepared to sign up to a long term (at least in airline terms) deal. The straightforward service proposition is also attractive to passengers, with short processing times and easy access.

Chapter 5

The description of Southend Airport's development, as outlined in paragraphs 5.19 to 5.23 and Figures 5.2 and 5.3, is generally correct.

Chapters 6 and 7

Paragraphs 6.2 and 6.3 describe site constraints and note that these can produce positive impacts as well as limits. Southend Airport has less of a site constraint but is able to deliver short walking distances through good planning. Having sufficient space also enables simple processes, such as being able to walk from the long term

car park, or having space to park aircraft, which contribute to both efficiency and passenger-friendliness.

Paragraphs 6.4 to 6.8 describe access constraints and Figure 6.2 shows rail journey times as a factor in airport choice. Southend Airport's journey time of 53 minutes is longer than those in Figure 6.2, but other aspects, such as the regularity, reliability and cost are also relevant, and here Southend Airport scores high in terms of simplicity.

Questions on access are as follows:

- *Are there longer-term or more extensive surface transport improvements and developments (beyond those committed to in the National Infrastructure Plan) that could support the other London airports to make best use of their capacity?*
- *Are there any ways that government, or any other stakeholders, could improve airport site access? Are there any innovative ways that airports could resolve site access problems?*

The National Infrastructure Plan is very high level and, unless noting a major project, much expenditure is covered by generic headings such as 'other'. To improve access to Southend Airport and enable its potential capacity to be used, the following are the early priorities:

- A rail timetable which recognises air passenger and staff needs, in terms of early and late trains and weekend and holiday timetables, including minimising bus replacement services during maintenance possessions
- Better quality rolling stock, comparable with other trains in the South East
- Improving pinch points on the roads serving Southend, in particular the A127

In the medium and longer term, the further priorities are:

- Improving rail journey times to London
- Providing additional rail capacity to meet Airport and commuter demands
- Local highway schemes to provide better connectivity for the Airport for all road users, including buses, cyclists, pedestrians and cars.

An innovative approach is required to provide better local public transport to serve both the Airport and new business parks to be developed adjacent to the Airport in accordance with the London Southend Airport and Environs Joint Area Action Plan.

Paragraphs 6.9 to 6.14 describe planning constraints and the questions are as follows:

- *Are there particular pros and cons to airport developments moving through the NSIP or Town and Country Planning process for a) developers or b) communities?*
- *Could either the NSIP or Town and Country planning process be improved, either the process itself or development of supporting policy, to support developers and meet the needs of local communities?*
- *Is there a current case for lifting planning caps for any airports in London or the South East? If not now, when should these caps be reviewed?*

Southend's experience, with a positive stance taken by central and local government, is that the normal planning process is adequate to deal with the type and scale of development undertaken thus far and envisaged in the medium term. Reducing the NSIP thresholds would not assist, and may make the process more onerous. Some processes, such as a current exercise in re-providing a footpath, are already unnecessarily onerous given the scale of activity. The current planning cap at Southend is in the form of an aircraft movement limit (53,300 per annum). At present this is adequate to enable better use of the existing capacity. At some stage in the longer term, if growth continues, it will be necessary to raise this cap. However, the Airport would expect to have to make a case based on the benefits and impacts and it is considered that the local community should have the opportunity to be involved at that time. Better safeguarding for the future growth of the airport would be achieved if local authorities had noise guidance (previously in PPG24).

Commercial constraints are discussed in paragraphs 6.15 to 6.17 and the questions are:

- *Are there any actions stakeholders could take to support airports in mitigating their commercial constraints?*
- *Are there any examples of best practice in this area?*

Southend's long term deal with easyjet is one example of commercial good practice, and another is the franchising of services through Stobartair. However, it is clear that airports must be prepared to take significant investment risks. In Southend's case, the decision to build a new rail station in advance of the opening of the new terminal was a clear commitment to improve access, without which it is possible that easyjet would not have been attracted.

Airspace constraints are covered in paragraphs 6.18 to 6.21 and the questions are:

- *Are there any medium term airspace developments that could support making best use of capacity, beyond those set out in the Interim Report?*
- *Are there any innovative long term airspace developments which could provide support beyond those set out in the Interim Report?*

As noted in Figure 5.3, the Interim Report used forecasts lower than the level of growth now envisaged. Airspace planning should therefore now take account of this change.

Paragraphs 6.22 and 6.23 deal with Regulatory, tax or legal constraints and the questions are:

- *Are there any new data available that the Commission should review in reference to its conclusions on regulatory tax or legal changes that could alter our assessment of their usefulness in making best use of capacity?*
- *Are there any areas of legal, tax or regulatory constraint, not considered by the Commission in its Interim Report, which merit further review?*

Southend Airport supports the general industry position that APD is too high. In particular, it clearly has a dampening effect on domestic demand.

Finally, paragraphs 6.24 and 6.25 note the potential impact of the Commission's final report on other airports and the question is:

- *Are there any topics or areas of further study beyond those set out in the Appraisal framework, that would allow the Commission to understand the impact of development at Heathrow or Gatwick on the other London Airports?*

The impact of a decision to develop an Inner Thames Estuary airport is set out in our response to the Inner Thames Estuary feasibility studies call for evidence. A decision to recommend another runway at either Heathrow or Gatwick is unlikely to have any significant effect on the ability to utilise the existing capacity at Southend.