

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND REGIONAL ASSEMBLY  
REGIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE**

Date: 14 October 2005

Subject: **Aviation Overview: Future of South East Airports**

Report of: Director of Planning and Transport

**Recommendations:**

It is recommended that the Committee note the contents of this report.

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**1. Purpose of report**

1.1 To present an overview of the Regional Assembly's policy in respect of the future role of aviation in the region.

**2. The Aviation White Paper 2003**

2.1 The "Future of Air Transport White Paper" (usually referred to as the "Aviation White Paper") was published in November 2003 and sets out the Government's view on the future role of the UK's principal airports over the next 30 years.

2.2 The Government's forecast for passenger growth across the wider South East suggested that passenger demand could rise from 117 million passengers per annum (mppa) in 2000 to approximately 200 mppa at 2015 and 300 mppa by 2030. On the basis of these forecasts, the White Paper set out a sequential approach for the development of airport capacity in the wider South East:

- i. Maximise use of the existing runway capacity at the key airports across the wider South East;
- ii. Develop an additional runway at Stansted Airport and lengthen the runway at Luton Airport to 3000 metres;
- iii. Subject to environmental targets being met, to develop a third runway at Heathrow Airport; OR
- iv. As an alternative to (iii) – if environmental targets are not met at Heathrow so precluding expansion there – to develop an additional runway at Gatwick Airport.

- 2.3 As part of the implementation of the White Paper, the Government required the operators of the key national and regional airports to prepare non-statutory Masterplans. These will set out development scenarios for the airports for the period to 2030. The key Masterplans for this region are those for Heathrow, Gatwick and Southampton airports.

### **3. The Regional Assembly Response**

- 3.1 The Assembly's response to the proposals to the White Paper was agreed by the Plenary in March 2004. Having considered the evidence available and the results of an analysis undertaken by consultants commissioned by the Assembly, the Plenary concluded that the White Paper's "predict and provide" approach to the future development of airport capacity was unsustainable. Instead the Assembly agreed that a more realistic planning level for passenger demand should be used. The Assembly's analysis suggested that this should be 240 mppa in 2030 (compared with the Government's figure of 300 mppa).
- 3.2 Furthermore the Assembly's analysis identified that at this level of growth there was a need for only one additional runway to be constructed in the wider South East. The Plenary resolved that this should be located at Stansted. At the same time the Assembly reaffirmed its support for the development of facilities at both Heathrow and Gatwick Airports up to the then existing limits of growth (i.e. 2-runway/5-terminals at Heathrow, 1-runway/2-terminals at Gatwick).
- 3.3 The response to the White Paper highlighted the Assembly's ongoing concern about the adverse impact on the environment and the implications for the labour market arising from additional growth at Heathrow. The White Paper made reference to these concerns. In his address to the March 2004 Plenary the then Transport Minister Tony McNulty MP confirmed that the Government accepted that the environmental concerns associated with Heathrow were real and that they did not necessarily assume these were capable of being addressed.
- 3.4 The airports at Southampton and Manston were identified in the White Paper as having the potential to accommodate additional growth in passenger demand, a view that was endorsed by the Assembly.
- 3.5 Whilst the future demand for airfreight services operating from the region continues to look strong, the most significant opportunities for growth continue to rest with "belly hold" freight in passenger services operating from Heathrow and Gatwick.
- 3.6 The Assembly's response to the Aviation White Paper provided the basis for the aviation policy set out in the core regional policies of the Draft South East Plan as agreed by the Plenary in July 2005.

#### **4. Implementation of the Aviation White Paper**

- 4.1 Subsequent to the White Paper being published the Department for Transport commissioned a programme of work under the banner of “Project for the Development of a Sustainable Heathrow” (PDSH) the objective of which is to examine in greater detail the range of issues associated with the Government’s proposal for an additional runway. It is anticipated that the results of this work will be reported towards the end of 2006, and that depending on the outcome, there may be a need to review the contents of the White Paper. The South East Plan identifies such an event as a potential trigger for a review of the relevant parts of the regional policy framework.
- 4.2 Airport operators have been progressing with the development of the Masterplans. The Assembly’s response to these, including the Southampton Airport Masterplan considered elsewhere on this agenda, have reflected the policy framework set out in the Draft South East Plan. The Assembly’s response to the consultation on the Draft Heathrow Masterplan highlighted how the environmental impact of current activity levels in and around Heathrow has led to the declaration of Air Quality Management Areas

#### **5. Additional Supporting Evidence**

- 5.1 Building upon its earlier research, the Assembly commissioned a further piece of consultancy work – “the Implications of the Aviation White Paper for South East England: Understanding the Evidence Base”. This piece of work came to a conclusion in Summer 2005. The objective of this work was to re-examine the available evidence with regards to future growth in aviation services against the broad framework of policies that exists at both national and regional level within which proposals for sustainable development should be brought forward.
- 5.2 The work concluded that the proposals in the White Paper, particularly in respect of additional growth at both Heathrow and Gatwick, were at variance with national policies on sustainable development. The work concluded by recommending:
- i) A move on from the predict and provide approach;
  - ii) Improvements in the aviation market so that it can set an economically efficient level of demand for aviation services;
  - iii) The need to take other necessary policy steps to mitigate aviation’s impact on climate change and sustainability in the wider sense;
  - iv) A stronger emphasis on regional/sub-regional aviation services as a means of increasing the economic and social benefits;
  - v) Encouragement for the development of alternatives to air services such as international high-speed rail services.

- 5.3 There is an increasing body of evidence to support the Assembly's policy on aviation. The Royal Commission for Environmental Pollution has considered the contribution of aviation to climate change. Its 2004 report concluded that Government's policy on aviation is inconsistent with sustainable development objectives, particularly the key target set out in the 2003 Energy White Paper to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050. This conclusion has been supported by more recent research undertaken by Manchester University's Tyndall Centre.

## **6. The European Context**

- 6.1 The policy approach adopted by the Assembly is reinforced by recent developments at a European level. The current Carbon Emission Trading Scheme (CETS) presently excludes consideration of the impact of aviation. However, the European Commission published a *Communiqué* on 28 September 2005, which supports including aviation within the CETS. Both the Government and key airport operators have welcomed this proposed inclusion.
- 6.2 In a recent consultation document – “Airport capacity, efficiency and safety in Europe” – the Commission have set out its thoughts on how aviation services should be developed as part of an integrated approach to the development of the transport system within the context of the “Lisbon Agenda”. In particular, the document encourages a shift towards the development of high-speed rail services as a realistic alternative to short haul air services (journeys of approximately 600km or 3 hours duration). The document also promotes the development of secondary (i.e. regional airports) as a means of supporting delivering of the Lisbon Agenda. The Committee of the Regions (led by Cllr Gordon Keymer) has been particularly active in promoting the important role that low cost air services operating from regional airports can play in supporting economic development.
- 6.3 The Commission's view is consistent with the Assembly's policy on aviation and we are actively working with Commission officials on this issue, in particular ensuring that they have full access to the evidential base that has been prepared by the Assembly.

## **7. Next Steps**

- 7.1 The Assembly has a clear policy framework in respect of the future role of aviation. This is derived from an analysis of the available evidence and balances the needs of travellers with the need to reduce the environmental impact of aviation services. The Assembly's policy is set out in the South East Plan and has been used in framing the response to individual Masterplans as they have come forward for comment.

- 7.2 Aviation is one aspect of the South East Plan in which the Assembly is questioning fundamentally the Government's approach. As such it is highly likely that it will be a topic for debate at the Examination in Public. The case presented to the Examination in Public will draw upon the evidence base touched on in this overview.
- 7.3 There will be a need to continue to pursue the Assembly's concerns on the draft airport Masterplans with the relevant operator. There will also be a need to respond to the outcomes of the work underway as part of the Project for the Development of a Sustainable Heathrow in due course. We should also continue to engage with the wider debate at a European level where the Assembly's evidence base is of interest to Commission officials. The Assembly's involvement in the INTERREG project focused on realising the potential of the High-Speed Train network is a further opportunity to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the development of international transport links is taken. In particular it provides an opportunity to promote the development of high-speed train services as a practical alternative to short-haul air services.
- 7.4 The future role of Southampton and Manston Airports in supporting delivery of the sub-regional strategies of South Hampshire and East Kent respectively is being considered in detail by the sub-regional groups. The outcome of this work will be considered by the Committee at its meeting in February 2006.

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