

Dear Minister,

Aviation – Access to London and world Markets through Heathrow and Gatwick

The Chairs of the Regional Transport Partnerships at their Meeting on 2 March discussed among other aviation issues pertinent to Scotland, the impact on the Scottish economy of the Westminster Government's revised policy regarding development of Heathrow Airport, and the change of ownership and focus at Gatwick Airport.

Scotland has historically been well linked to international markets through its access to international air services primarily at Heathrow and to a lesser degree Gatwick.

With capacity at Heathrow now being fully taken as a result of continuing growth in world travel and trade, pressure on slots is now such that UK Regional services are being squeezed out and replaced with higher revenue yielding transcontinental traffic. The Chairs noted the loss of the BMI services between Glasgow and Heathrow and the potential challenge to other Scottish BMI routes. Of the 28 regional airports in the UK only 6 currently continue to have access to Heathrow, the others have to access international air services through European hub airports. The decision of the Westminster government not to proceed with any increase in capacity at Heathrow will have a disproportionate economic impact on the remoter UK regions and Scotland in particular as access from these areas continues to be squeezed by airlines to achieve greatest financial return for their owners.

Business representatives in London appear equally concerned regarding the decision not to increase Heathrow's capacity. From their perspective London needs to develop better links with the emerging eastern markets and is losing out as a world centre to Amsterdam and Paris because this isn't happening. Pressure is therefore even greater on Heathrow and the airlines to change the historic usage of the airport when links to America were the major economic need. The impact of reacting to this pressure will be the further diminution of relatively low volume UK regional services including those to Scotland which are critical to the Scottish economy.

The Chairs are of the view that effective access to Heathrow from Scotland must be retained and they would be supportive of concerted action to achieve this aim. Without increased capacity some form of protection of existing slots is necessary.

Gatwick has increasingly filled the role of the main airport for regional access to London with limited intercontinental connections for business traffic. With the recent change in ownership of the airport, the approval by the CAA of substantial increases in landing charges, the squeeze on Heathrow capacity, and the demands from London business for greater international access, regional access is again the potential loser. While this has not as yet impacted on Scotland, though there was a temporary loss of the BMI services from Aberdeen, the potential is there for the loss of slots, again with economic implications for Scotland. There are also concerns that increased landing charges and increasing pressure at Heathrow and Gatwick could in turn result in loss of landing slots at London's third airport, London City, which also provides economically important business connections to/from Scotland. Indeed business flights between Dundee Airport and London City were due to be reduced from January of this year but have been maintained with RTP financial support.

As for Heathrow, the Chairs would encourage the Scottish Government to look, in collaboration with the Westminster Government, to establishing a means by which existing services to Gatwick and London City from Scotland can be retained for the future security of the Scottish economy.

Yours Faithfully

Iris J Hawkins

Chair of Zettrans

On behalf of the Chairs of the Scottish Regional Transport Partnerships