

Minutes of the Cross-Party Group on Aviation

12 May 2022

18:30 – 19:30

Virtual Meeting – Zoom / Join by phone

MSPs attendees:

Paul McLellan MSP
Graham Simpson MSP
Sharon Dowey MSP

Non-MSPs attendees:

Robert Griggs – Airlines UK
Emma Wade – ABTA
Jonathan Hinkles - Loganair
Karen Musgrave – Barrhead Travel
Roddie MacPhee – ABTA Scotland
Mike Tibbert – SPAA
Lauren Broughton – UK Inbound
Greg Maxwell – Edinburgh Airport
Peter Carroll McClean – Glasgow Airport
Mike Parker – parliamentary researcher
Janice Hogarth – CPG secretary/SPAA
Josh Hill – Parliamentary adviser

Apologies

Tracy Docherty – If Only
Ross Southgate – BALPA
Henk van Klaveren – AOA
Ali Gayward - Easyjet
David Neill - Jet 2

Welcome

The meeting was opened by Paul McLellan who as Co-chair would be chairing this meeting and Graham Simpson would chair the next meeting.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from last meeting were approved.

Presentation from Airlines UK

Robert Griggs gave a presentation on the current position of the recovery of the industry (as per attached slides) which covered the effect of the withdrawal of travel restrictions and the current levels of recovery. Robert pointed out that recovery would be a bumpy ride as the industry was still well below pre-pandemic levels and that recovery levels would vary in different countries.

Recovery in Scotland was sitting at a lower level than other parts of the UK and Graham Simpson asked why Scotland was further behind than the rest of the UK and the reason for this, which Robert commented that this related to the later withdrawal of travel restrictions in Scotland which had also led to a reduction in the level of incoming tourists due to the uncertainty around travel and Scotland was currently sitting at about a combined level of – 37% for Edinburgh/Glasgow and Aberdeen airports.

The situation was at last improving and report from Edinburgh airport was that traffic figures in March had managed to achieve 60% of 2019 levels and that in April this had increased to 70%. The main areas that were holding the traffic figures back were long haul and in particular the far east markets.

Glasgow Airport commented that there were less available aircraft to operate some routes and their focus had been on returning and retaining traffic levels on existing routes with fewer new additional routes coming on board. They also recognised that there would be difficulties ahead with the increased cost of living and fuel increases likely to add further to costs as airlines fuel hedging deals were renegotiated.

The Air Space change programme was in process and sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) had a mandate to follow of 10% reduction by 2030 by the DfT and there were potential sites that could be developed in Scotland which would be a great benefit.

Review of response on the Scottish Government Aviation Strategy paper

Roddie MacPhee raised questions about the consideration of subjects such as the route development fund/ progress on APD(ADT), the expansion of the ADS scheme for travel from the islands and any additional help on increasing the number of PSO routes.

It was noted that there need to be a resilience plan for areas such as security to allow a reduction in time for new employees to be vetted.

Jonathan Hinkles also talked about the problems with the switching off of the EGNOS satellite system which had led to an increased level of disruption on island

routes. Jonathan also discussed the future of island travel which should be split into short term (next 6 months) and long term.

He confirmed that the earlier comment about fuel hedging would be key as airlines were unlikely to be able to achieve the same levels of costs for fuel which would in turn have to be added to fares levels and he quoted the fact that Loganair had their fuel hedged until April 2023 which would then likely result in an increase in the level of their fuel surcharge.

Karen Musgrave suggested that there should be a flexible fund to help encourage new routes with that money being ring fenced. Robert added indeed the route development fund would be crucial for hub connectivity.

Janice Hogarth added that the subject of recruitment which had been raised previously in Robert's presentation was a major issue for all aspects of the travel industry and this was hampering recovery and consideration on help in relations to apprentice schemes and the shortage of approved examiners.

Future Round Table Discussion

It was agreed that a meeting should be held in person prior to the summer recess and that the minister should be invited to the following meeting in September and Graham Simpson agreed to check for available dates.

The aim of the group would be to create a report of recommendations of the CPG on their view on the future of aviation which would be sent to Government and that this would be publicised accordingly.

AOCB

Paul McLellan suggested the possibility of the group sponsoring a stand inside the Parliament building for 2 – 3 days to heighten the awareness and gain interest in the travel sector.

Paul also suggested the possibility of a debate on travel inside Parliament.