

EDINBURGH AIRPORT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE.

Minutes of the 197th meeting held on Monday 16th August 2021 via Zoom.

Present Robert Carr (Chair)
Janice Hogarth (Secretary)
Gordon Dewar (Chief Executive EAL)
Gordon Robertson Communications Director EAL
Donald Spencer The Consumers Association
Kate Watt Ratho & District Community Council
Alexia Haramis Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce
Cllr Dave Dempsey Fife Council
Cllr Tom Conn West Lothian Council
John Howison Cramond & Barnton Community Council
Cllr Kevin Lang City of Edinburgh Council
Julian Slatter ABTA
Alan Mitchell Fife Chamber of Commerce
Adam Cumming Edinburgh Airport Amenities Group
David Dunphy Frequent Flyer representative
Nada Shawa Edinburgh Airport Accessibility Forum

Apologies Cllr Carol Hamilton Scottish Borders Council
Cllr Russell Imrie Midlothian Council
Sandy Leggett Air Traffic Services
Frazer McKinstry Edinburgh Airport Operators Committee
Sandy Smart STUC
Cllr John McMillan
Lindsay Cole Edinburgh Airport Noise Advisory Board
Ken McNab SPAA
Greg Maxwell Head of Corporate Affairs EAL
Anna Herriman Sestrans
Gary Harrison Police Services Scotland
David Hull Kirkliston Community Council

1. Welcome

Robert Carr opened the remote meeting being held by Zoom, adding a warm welcome to all including some observers who had joined the meeting.

2. The minutes of the previous meeting

The Minutes of the meeting of 10th May 2020 were approved

3. Other matters arising from the Minutes

A new Rolling Action Plan would be created for this meeting.

4. Chief Executive's Report (EAL)

A PowerPoint presentation from EAL had been circulated to EACC members in advance covering the report on the last quarter, continuing the case for aviation, political engagement, the sustainability launch, the Customer Supply Centre, social media engagement and airspace and noise.

Gordon Dewar spoke to the slides on the report on the last quarter and political engagement.

He started his report by commenting that air traffic at Edinburgh Airport had increased and was now up to 20% of where it should have been compared with 2019. He added that this was disproportionate compared with Europe where the traffic had returned to about 60% and that the rest of the UK was sitting at between 25% and 30%.

He said that this was a reflection of Scottish Government policy rather than customer demand, according to feedback from researches EAL had carried out. The barriers for passengers were the cost of tests combined with the level of testing required and uncertainty.

Recovery was very competitive and restrictions in Scotland were not helping against European regulations and restrictions and a more relaxed approach in the rest of the UK.

All US Hubs were open between Europe and the US and even some to other parts of the UK but there were no North American carriers due to fly to and from Scotland in 2021.

The daily seat factor had improved but two thirds of that related to domestic traffic which was currently doing quite well. Operating at 70% was not at profitable for the airlines, but they were prepared to operate unprofitably for a period to re-establish passenger confidence.

For capacity recovery there needed to be a change of Scottish Government approach and advice and EAL had given up forecasting the timing of recovery and instead was working more flexible planning around a number of scenarios.

Gordon Robertson commented that the airport had tried to be collaborative with Scottish Government but there was little or no ministerial engagement and the airport had taken the decision that could not say nothing but had to react.

It was agreed that the CEO's report for the next EACC meeting in November would be in the pre-March 2020 written format.

(Action: EAL to provide the CEO's report for the next EACC meeting in November in the pre-March 2020 written format.)

5. Recovery of Aviation in Scotland Report

The Recovery of Aviation in Scotland Report EAL had been circulated to EACC members in advance.

Gordon Dewar spoke to the slides on continuing the case for aviation.

He stated that with a few months left of the summer there needed to be a focus on more than just holidays, as future connectivity was at risk.

EAL had sent a letter to the Scottish Government in July regarding the recovery document but had received no response or acknowledgement to date. The document had laid out the hard facts as to where things were. Gordon Dewar admitted that EAL did not want to stop talking to Scottish Government but was very frustrated as it was the clinicians who had their hand on the tiller which was all very negative.

Gordon Dewar reinforced the need for Scottish Government to remove restrictions and provide a roadmap out of the current situation to allow EAL to paint a picture to encourage airlines to want to operate at Edinburgh Airport and to encourage and reassure passengers.

Gordon Dewar said Scottish Government currently had no forward strategy for 2022, no clarity on APD and no clarity on support for the aviation industry which made the EAL planning impossible.

Gordon Dewar said that he thought it would take five to ten years to return to the 2019 level of connectivity.

The Scottish Government need a plan to change the current way of working which appeared to be two weeks ahead and not two years as it should be.

Gordon Dewar added that he was chairing the Aviation Working Group established by Scottish Government to try and achieve a co-ordinated effort but there was a lack of forward planning by Scottish Government. An example as to how this lack of planning was manifesting itself was the digital vaccination certificates which the rest of Europe and the rest of the UK had access to but Scotland currently did not have, and was unlikely to have for another month or two.

Questions and comments were taken from the EACC.

David Dunphy stated that the cost of tests had been reduced across the UK and this had included Scotland but it was pointed out that there was still only one test provider accepted by the Scottish Government as they had a problem with private sector testing.

Julian Slatter pointed out the problems facing the business and leisure travel agency sector warning that there were many problems ahead with the end of furlough on the 30th September. The impact was not just for airports and airlines.

Tom Conn talked about the lack of a coordinated strategy by Scottish Government with local councils for example in relation to students and how they would be able to start their studies at the beginning of the new year as well as the fact that there would be reductions in the numbers of overseas students coming to Scotland.

Kevin Lang asked how other UK airports were faring in their engagement with the UK Government. Gordon Dewar responded commenting that engagement with the UK Government in England was better with weekly calls and pre-consultation on many issues. Gordon Dewar said it was apparent that the UK Government was far more focused on the recovery of the UK economy than the Scottish Government was on the economy in Scotland.

Janice Hogarth commented that Scottish passengers were being disadvantaged at every corner including digital vaccination certificates as even Northern Ireland had recently launched their digital APP and Scotland were still at least a month behind before theirs was likely to be launched.

John Howison provided an update on test costs.

6. EAL strategy on sustainability update

Gordon Robertson spoke to the slides on the sustainability strategy that EAL had launched on the 23rd June which was a carbon enhanced scheme to demonstrate EAL was a ‘best business and trusted neighbour’

A solar farm would be created at the end of the runway and was a great platform to demonstrate the change in approach. EAL was now a member of the European Climate pact.

There had been a request from people to hear in more detail what EAL’s plans were and there would be an event with an interview with Brian Taylor in September which would explain the plan and give an opportunity at the interview for questions via audience participation. This would be followed by lots of social media.

Gordon Robertson finished his report by adding that although there had been a hiring freeze, a new Head of Sustainability had been appointed and could be introduced to the EACC at a future meeting, should the EACC wish that.

Gordon Robertson added that there had been good reaction and engagement with Scottish Government policy makers involved in Net Zero on the Sustainability Strategy. The Minister had attended the launch. Collaboration here was much better on this issue as it was seen by Scottish Government to be relevant to the transition to net zero and not just about airport growth or aviation issues.

Customer Support Centre

Gordon Robertson spoke to the slides on the new Customer Support Centre.

He reported that the Centre was aiming to deliver best practice by pulling together and centralising customer support. EAL was participating in the UK Government’s “Kick-start” scheme (which provided funding to create new job placements for 16- to 24-year-olds on Universal Credit who are at risk of long-term unemployment) to recruit new customer support team members. The Customer Support Centre sought to provide a consistent experience across the airport with the centre open on a Monday to Friday basis but offering a “chatbot” solution out of hours and at weekends thus creating a 24/7 facility. The idea was to offer total support and not just a reactive service based on complaints. Again, a new Head of Customer Support had been appointed and could be introduced to the EACC at a future meeting, should the EACC wish that.

Robert Carr asked for an update of the new service for passengers with reduced mobility which had been reported on at previous meetings. Both Gordon Robertson and Gordon Dewar reported that the service was going well, but overall, the numbers of passengers with reduced mobility was disproportionately low, perhaps because of health risks and shielding. EAL would produce a report on the numbers and the head of this service could present to a future EACC meeting.

(Actions: A report by EAL on passengers with reduced mobility would be produced and once the appointments were in place the new Heads of Sustainability and the Customer Support Centre should come to the EACC to present and an update would be provided by the Head of the PRM service.)

7. Update re road access

Gordon Dewar and Gordon Robertson provided updates on the road access issues. A proposal from EAL was currently before the City of Edinburgh Council Planning Committee but the officials were recommending refusal. A meeting was to take place that week at which EAL would be represented. The CEC officials favoured a route through the next housing development and past a school, which appeared unwise. The road which was proposed by and would be funded by EAL was an opportunity to solve the problems from Gogar to the airport and around Maybury.

John Howison and Kate Watt spoke in favour of the EAL scheme and against the CEC proposal on the grounds of safety, congestion and connectivity.

Gordon Robertson said that it would be unwise to put the new road at the IBG area and that it would be far better to run it along the side of the railway.

8. UKACC Updates including recent meetings

Robert Carr updated the meeting commenting on the distribution of the UKACC weekly Bulletins which gave a full overview on what is happening across the UK in the aviation world. (thanks to Janice Hogarth for forwarding these and other notifications from UKACC)

There was a reminder that the DfT night flights (Part 2) submission was due by the 3rd September 2021.

Airlines UK had recently published a York Aviation report on night flights and there had also been the results of the CAA Noise attitudes survey and a report on noise and health.

The UKACC AGM would be held on the 18/19th November and there was to be an election for Chair. Colin Flack, who had spoken to the EACC, had agreed to put his name forward.

9. Update on report from EANRP

Kevin Lang updated the meeting on the progress of the Edinburgh Airport Noise Review Panel in relation to the consultation responses and the interviews with various members of EANAB and EAL employees.

It was clear that EANAB was not working effectively and the Panel was now looking at the solution and how to create specific recommendations to help EANAB and EAL move forward.

By the time of the next EACC meeting, it was hoped that the Panel would be able to update EACC on the recommendations that would have been put forward although he added that there would be no compulsion for these recommendations to be adopted.

Air Space and Noise – ACP

Gordon Robertson spoke to the slides on airspace and noise.

Gordon Robertson advised that Stage 1 for EAL had now been passed on the 30th July.

Stage 2 would be to develop and assess the use of sat navs and not beacons. EAL will look to engage with stakeholders and an engagement plan will be being created and Gordon Robertson would revert to the EACC.

(Action : Gordon Robertson to advise EACC of timeline with key milestones to EACC)

Stage 3 will be the consultation phase.

Adam Cumming asked if some people will get more noise by using sat navs and Gordon Robertson responded that there will need to be consideration given to balancing noise at local levels over one area or the use of a wider area being affected. The potential route over the Forth would redirect some traffic away from some areas but bring additional traffic to others.

Gordon Robertson reminded the EACC that the Airspace Change Organising Group (ACOG) had been established at the request of the DfT and the CAA to coordinate the delivery of key aspects of the Government's Airspace Modernisation Strategy, namely the national programme of airspace change amongst major UK airports. Gordon Robertson added that there would be an aviation masterplan run by ACOG and that Scotland will be covered under FASI North. The CAA would not push forward if the EAL proposals did not fit with this plan.

Gordon Robertson asked how communities were likely to react when aircraft noise returned. It would not just be like switching on a light bulb, as recovery would take time and it will probably be 2023/2024 before we knew the answer as it would only be by then that we would return to 2019 levels of flight numbers at Edinburgh Airport.

Gordon referred to his slides quoting Information / Policies / Dialogue and Regulation.

Adam Cumming commented that we must try and make this work and asked if there should be more engagement with ICCAN and where do they fit in with regard to UK airports ? Gordon Robertson responded that ICCAN had been the subject of UK Government Review by the DfT, it had made its pitch as a noise body but there had been no clarification on the future role of ICCAN at this time. It would be interesting to see where ICCAN fitted when the Westminster Parliament returns and the DfT report on ICCAN is presented..

Gordon added that EAL had done quite well with the Noise lab which had helped their rating and he added that investing in EANAB was a positive move as well but he also commented that EAL would have to raise their game for ACP.

Robert Carr reported that ICCAN had offered to return to present again to the EACC on its future plans and there was consensus that offer should be accepted. The role of ICCAN going forward ought to be clear by the next EACC meeting in November. **(Action : Rob Light from ICCAN to be invited to the next EACC meeting in November)**

10. Rolling Action Plan

See under matters arising above.

11. AOCB

It was hoped that the next meeting in November would be in person for some and remote arrangements would be in place for those who would prefer that.

Robert Carr asked for suggestions for topics at that meeting to be referred to Janice Hogarth in advance.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 1230

