

AIRPORT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of Meeting held on Wednesday, 4th December 2013

Present: Cllr Jeff James (Chairman) Vale of Glamorgan (Rhoose)
Cllr Lis Burnett Vale of Glamorgan Council
Cllr Dilwar Ali Cardiff Council
Cllr Stuart Egan Vale of Glamorgan
Anthony Ernest Vale Marketing Group
Peter Cole Capital Region Tourism
Jon Horne Chief Executive, Cardiff Airport
Spencer Birns Head of Air Services Development
Avril Kitchen Cardiff Airport (Secretariat)

Apologies: Cllr Neil Moore Vale of Glamorgan
Cllr Phil White Bridgend Council
Cllr G Hinchey Cardiff Council
Helen Tustin Regal Travel – ABTA & Advantage

Also in

Attendance: Members of the Public

Item
No:

Action

1.0 Welcome from the Chairman

The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed all Members.

2.0 Apologies

Apologies were noted as above.

3.0 Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 17 June 2013

The Chairman and Committee agreed that the Minutes of the last ACC held on 17th June 2013 were a true and accurate record of the meeting. There were no Matters Arising.

The Chairman asked Jon Horne to kindly update the Committee and give an overview of news since the last meeting in June.

4.0 Report from the Airport Directors

4.1 Jon Horne began by discussing the current news of the day that Flybe had made a decision to pull the aircraft that operated the Glasgow and Paris routes out of Cardiff from 19th January 2014.

The media were trying to make this decision a hammer blow for Cardiff. However, they were forgetting the fact that Flybe had only just announced their four new ski flights this winter which was a real positive for both the airport and the airline.

Jon Horne further explained the changes within Flybe, as it has been going through a major reconstruction to save the business. As part of that process they are losing over 500 jobs and closing operating bases to ensure the business goes forward and that it can be rebuilt. There would be no closure of the Cardiff operation however we would lose the Glasgow and Paris flight as a result of this process. Jon was keen to impress that this is not an airport issue and that it is purely a Flybe decision.

As both routes have been operating very successfully, the challenge would now be to find another airline that will take up these two routes before 19th January. This will be a challenge but he felt confident that this would happen and we could continue to provide this service for our customers.

Flybe will still continue its other flights out of Cardiff, including the additional ones for the Six Nations rugby events and Jon Horne hoped that as a business they return stronger and to continue to operate from Cardiff.

Jon Horne updated Members on other matters -

Following the initiative of the “listening Airport” and asking for the views and thoughts of the public on the airport - this proved invaluable and we received over 700 responses through different channels. Many of the responses concerned the same areas – free wifi within the terminal and free trolleys and the £1 drop off charge. We now have free wifi and we have amended the trolley system so that it is a £1 return facility. (The £1 drop off will be discussed a little later as part of a wider subject).

Another criticism from travellers concerned customer service in the terminal so we have really focused on that and are rolling out new training across all companies on the airport to ensure that everyone has a deeper understanding of customer service and what our customers expect. We want Cardiff not to be just convenient; we want it to feel very good and not just “neutral”.

I am very pleased to tell you that since that time, we have had letters to the First Minister saying that the improvements have been noticed. We genuinely want the airport not to be just good for the people of Wales and something the staff can be proud of too.

We have also been looking at the infrastructure and facilities and in the next week will be announcing detailed proposals of changes that we will be making. Getting back to the “listening airport”, we will be addressing things that are a problem such as the taxi area and, using the latest technology, making the security search area as pleasurable as it can be and more.

The forward security control point on the airport approach road will disappear and we will have new technology installed at the set-down area in front of the terminal, as well as some cosmetic changes that begin a process of changes, rolling out over the next few years.

However, the biggest focus is on growing our passenger numbers and building on our positive relationship with the airlines.

In July, after 12 months planning to re-model the whole of the airfield, we received the first British Airways Airbus 380 aircraft into Cardiff. Eventually, we hope that once this aircraft is fully in service, British Airways will choose Cardiff as a diversionary airport now that we know we can operationally accept it.

Introducing her to the Committee, Jon Horne advised that Paula Morris had joined the airport three weeks ago as Head of Marketing and Communications. Paula Morris would head up a team and strengthen this area with her focus being on social media. (Paula Morris would undertake a presentation at the next ACC meeting).

4.2 Spencer Birns Updated Members on the air services out of Cardiff:

We continue to try to convince airlines to fly from Cardiff and are also looking at other commercial income streams.

On aircraft visits, as well as the A380, we have had the new Thomson Boeing 787 Dreamliner undertaking training here.

We have met with our incumbent carriers and have focussed on attracting growth in traffic again. Our traffic is currently 4% up.

Thanks very much to those that have supported us on social media.

P & O Cruise flights – these were fully booked before being advertised. We are encouraging them to grow again.

Sandals have announced a flight to Barbados from Cardiff.

These are only little steps but they are all positive. It's all about how we keep what we have got already and how we build on it.

Looking at the inbound market – the Dusseldorf one a week flight – we have found that the Germans are coming here for a week and spending in Wales. This will be continued into next year with Germanwings.

We have found that 75% of flights to Amsterdam are connecting to other countries, with Germany being the biggest market, then the Nordic countries and Dubai the largest long-haul.

The Cardiff Airport to Cardiff Central T9 bus service commenced in August and we have found that KLM passengers use it all the time, giving them a warm welcome to Wales. We are also speaking to KLM and Visit Wales to promote Wales in Germany even more.

Aer Lingus continues its morning connection via Dublin to New York, Boston and Chicago, clearing Immigration in Dublin. They will also add a further service to Toronto summer 2014.

We re-visited our fees and charges to try attracting more general aviation to Cardiff. We welcomed a GA “fly-in” during the summer with all charges being donated to the Wales Air Ambulance. This not only gave us a good bit of PR but also showed that we had lowered our prices to encourage more GA flights into the flying clubs.

We also continue to encourage pilots to train here and use our Instrument Landing System; we are in talks with the British Air Rally and German Aviation enthusiasts.

Cardiff Aviation, a company based at MOD St Athan, have recently taken over the lease of our hangar on the Southside of the airfield and have installed three flight simulators, and intend eventually to move their operations to the hangar. This will become a training facility for commercial pilots. The company is fronted by quite a high profile person and it is hoped that eventually, it will accommodate up to 120 international students at one time. This will include foreign students, who will stay here, experience Wales, bringing their families back here – so it brings a high net wealth into Cardiff Airport and Wales.

We have some major events being planned for here next year – with our normal international rugby flights in the New Year, the Heineken Cup, and the UEFA Super Cup in August. In addition, the NATO event in September. These all involve big airlifts, involving a lot of planning and challenges but the airport team are very keen to work on their experience and make them as successful as past airlifts and special events.

5. The Chairman thanked both Jon Horne and Spencer Birns and asked Members for their questions:

5.1 Cllr Egan was pleased to see the new bus in operation and that passengers were using it. Even though it has been operating for some time now it had come under some criticism. He had noticed however that Bristol Airport were advertising their Greyhound bus link in Swansea and wondered if the Cardiff airport service should be reviewed and if it had the scope to take in Newport too?

Jon Horne explained that the current bus service was an “Express” service linking the airport with the Central Station in Cardiff. It would be good to see a similar route link with Newport but the current service needed to be a success first.

The Chairman felt it was interesting and good news to hear that a lot of KLM passengers use it. Unfortunately most of the local people see it empty and that part of the problem is it operates 24/7. I believe that the Minister will be reviewing its timetable in January but from the airport’s point of view is it a success?

Jon Horne advised that from a PR and consumer perspective it is very positive and it is essential that we have this product. It is vital as a Welcome to Wales. Both North and West Wales residents use the service. I agree it does have its peaks and troughs though.

The Chairman commented that if it is successful, he thought everyone will be very glad but local people are moaning that it only has one or two passengers on board.

Anthony Ernest asked if travel companies could incentivise people to use a more holistic approach.

Councillor Lis Burnett suggested that if Paula was presenting at the next meeting A more holistic approach could be investigated as it is much about marketing.

The Chairman felt that this was a good point and perhaps Paula could cover this at the next meeting? (This was agreed).

Paula

Peter Cole added that the Greyhound service is a commercial decision by them and is part funded by Bristol Airport. There is a similar service as the Cardiff bus from Temple Meads to Bristol Airport. But it is the same – sometimes there is only one person on board and sometimes it's a full bus nevertheless it is the easiest way to get to Bristol Airport.

He further added that he believed we should keep the faith with the Cardiff – Airport link service and take the opportunity to use it positively.

The Chairman explained that there has been a redirection in subsidies to the bus companies and they have had to reduce services in the Vale and I have personal issues about it at the moment. So I agree that if it provides that additional service then it is good but it has to be on the appropriate frequency.

Spencer Birns felt that we also have to look at the service from the other side with regards to inbound tourism and the fact that we are getting very positive comments from inbound travellers. He confirmed that although the bus is being used, the taxi usage has remained stable.

5.2 Anthony Ernest enquired about the flight indicator board suggested for the car park and Jon Horne confirmed that this will be considered within the overall car park revamp.

6. The Chairman thanked Jon Horne and all the members for their contribution to the meeting. As there was no more business, he opened the meeting up to the floor and invited questions from members of the public.

He added that it was good to see so many people coming to the meetings and for their continued support of the airport.

6.1 Clive Sedgebeer – was glad to see that the airport was involved with big events next year such as NATO and everything helped put Cardiff on the map.

However, he was very disappointed to see that even with over 800 destinations served via Amsterdam, the Welsh Government chose not to use Cardiff when embarking on their trade missions and that this really showed them in bad light.

Edwina Hart had just announced a list of trade missions and these could be made from CWL via Amsterdam. If the Welsh Government are not using Cardiff for these journeys then questions should be asked of those Welsh Government people.

In answer, Spencer Birns advised that of course, wherever possible we want the Welsh Government and all Welsh businesses to use Cardiff (and Amsterdam) as much as possible and we encourage this as much as we can. However, he believed on this occasion KLM refused to lower their prices and therefore Government staff are going on other, more cost effective flights. He thought that British Airways offered them the best deal.

Three meetings were held between KLM and the Welsh Government to try and broker a better deal but to no avail. KLM have no flexibility and has not changed its pricing policy for about the last two years.

Jon Horne added that when both himself and Spencer Birns had visited Routes in Las Vegas with Visit Wales, they had used KLM and Delta return flights. He also confirmed that Mrs Hart had used KLM several times this year and that everyone did what they could to use Cardiff.

- 6.2** John Dellarmi – my experience is that every time I fly to Glasgow from Cardiff, I have to come back into Bristol Airport due to the timings from Cardiff.

Jon Horne confirmed that he was absolutely right and that it was a point made on ITV Wales recently. One of the issues with the Glasgow flight was that you could not go to Glasgow, do any business and take a return to Cardiff the same day.

One reason that Flybe is removing the Glasgow flight is that they cannot improve those timings. Our big focus is on getting an airline to carry more people from Cardiff to Glasgow but the timing has to be right and this is a huge challenge for us with the airlines.

- 6.3** Laurence Evans – going back to the discussions on the Greyhound service, he wondered whether it would be a good idea for that Bristol bus and the T9 Cardiff service to maybe meet at Culverhouse Cross and use it as a hub? This may help encourage more people to use it?

Jon Horne advised that unfortunately with the T9, people only noticed when the bus was empty and never commented about the bus when it was full. In the last few months a survey has been undertaken on the T9 service and from its start on 1st August this year, with little publicity; it carried 13,500 people in the first month which was an incredible figure.

Further discussions ensued concerning the T9 service and the possible changes to its timings, route and stops that could be looked at in the New Year.

- 6.4** Clive Sedgebeer – asked if there was an update on the opening up of the Spectator Terrace?

Unfortunately, should the roof of the terrace be re-opened, a considerable amount of money would have to be spent on the roof to enable the accommodation of people in a safe and secure manner. This, along with the security requirements, would not see the facility opened in the short term. However, it would not be discounted in the future.

- 6.5** Spencer Birns confirmed to Peter Jones that there is advertising on the station barriers and this has been one of the best types of advertising.

- 6.6** Councillor Phil Clark (Rhoose Ward) – explained that he had considerable experience with airlines and airports as he had been a former pilot for - amongst others - Airways Cymru some years ago. He felt that not enough importance was being paid to reducing the landing fees at Cardiff.

However, Jon Horne commented that charges to airlines are competitively priced in the market place. Cardiff rates have to be better than elsewhere and he could not say more than that as it was commercially confidential.

Further discussions ensued concerning the need for a low cost carrier and the means of attracting airline companies to Cardiff.

6.7 Councillor Ali commended that he had received several complaints concerning car park charges at the airport. Spencer Birns explained the very competitive pricing for the car park:

Spencer Birns added that we price check our parking policy against similar products and it is closely monitored and tweaked all the time.

7.0 As there were no further questions, the Chairman thanked everyone for attending, especially those coming long distances, and showing such interest in the airport. It was important that their views were heard and that they had the opportunity to get answers from the experts here at the airport.

8.0 Date of Next Meeting

To be advised and circulated to Members. It will also be placed on airport website for members of the public.

Distribution:

All ACC Members
Airport Web page for information

December 2013