

AIRPORT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of Meeting held on Monday, 18th February 2013

Present:

Cllr Jeff James (Chair)	Vale of Glamorgan (Rhoose)
Cllr Lis Burnett	Vale of Glamorgan Council
Cllr Gwyn John	Vale of Glamorgan Council
Cllr Dilwar Ali	Cardiff Council
Cllr Arthur Paulett	Llancarfan Community Council
Cllr Jane Hanks	Llancarfan Community Council
Helen Tustin	Regal Travel – ABTA & Advantage
Anthony Ernest	Vale Marketing Group
Steve Hodgetts (SH)	Business & Commercial Director Cardiff Airport
Deb Barber	Operations Director Cardiff Airport
Avril Brown	Cardiff Airport (Secretariat)

Apologies:

Cllr Neil Moore	Vale of Glamorgan
Cllr Stuart Egan	Vale of Glamorgan
Cllr Phil White	Bridgend Council
Cllr Ralph Cook	Cardiff Council
Peter Cole	Capital Region Tourism

Also in

Attendance:

Clive Sedgebeer	Member of the Public
Philip Jones	Member of the Public
Gary Barlow	GJB Travel

**Item
No:**

Action:

1.0 Apologies

Apologies were noted as above.

2.0 Welcome from the Chairman

The Chairman opened the Committee meeting and welcomed all Members, in particular new members as follows:

Deb Barber – Airport Operations Director, and

Helen Tustin of Regal Travel, who has been invited to join the Committee representing ABTA Wales.

Cllr Gwyn John – representing Vale of Glamorgan (substitute for Cllr Egan);

Cllr Jane Hanks and Arthur Paulett, representing Llancarfan Community Council.

3.0 Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 1st October 2012

After noting a small number of amendments, the Chairman and Committee agreed that the Minutes of the last ACC held on 1st October 2012 were a true and accurate record of the meeting. The final amended copy would be placed on the airport's web-page.

Matters Arising

None.

4.0 Report from Airport Director

Management Restructure

4.1 Airline Update

Steve reported that passenger numbers for 2012 had finished down on the year before by 16%. This is entirely due to bmibaby pulling out. Although we had a new, limited programme by Vueling, we had not replaced the Malaga route. However, for November of 2012, we were 6% up year on year.

The first month of this year was down entirely to snow, which we didn't have this time last year. However, the flights we lost over the snow period were not due to CWL being closed but due to problems at other airports. If this had not happened, we would have been at the same level as last year.

The business remains challenging. Flybe announced changes but luckily this did not have any effect on their Cardiff operations and this gives us confidence in moving forward.

There are other things that may happen but cannot officially announce anything at this stage due to confidentiality but it will all add capacity for the summer.

KLM fixed on long haul but there is an opportunity to fulfil the short haul European routes too.

Vueling will return to Cardiff at Easter and will be putting their operation up by 80%, which is positive for the future. They will have larger seat capacity for 2013. All indications are that the early bookings are doing well.

Steve agreed that Bristol is carrying more passengers than Cardiff but this is due to their range of destinations and flights.

4.2 Marketing

There is a much stronger marketing campaign under way at the moment, with sponsorship of ticket gates at both Swansea and Cardiff stations promoting Vueling for this year. There are also print campaigns taking place in various local papers and in life magazines. Vueling are also undertaking radio sponsorship of sport and weather on various radio stations.

Other companies undertaking marketing are KLM, for long haul operations in the Spring; Visit Wales and Lufthansa and Aer Arran for inbound tourists from Dusseldorf and Dublin.

All in all, after a period of reticence in marketing our product, Cardiff is back promoting its core services to the market.

4.3

Sale of the Airport

Steve discussed the possible future buy-out of the airport to the Welsh Government. All the Directors had been surprised by the news earlier in the year and were now in the course of going through the due diligence process and believed that a decision would be made within the next few weeks.

At present, the airport management team and staff are unaware of how this will go but are positive for the future. He felt that the WG taking over will lead to further commitments from them, but at this stage does not know what their priority commitments will be. Nevertheless, the airport looks forward to progressing the business with the new owners if that time comes.

4.4

Transport Links

Steve was pleased to advise that the airport had been invited by SEWTA (South East Wales Transport Alliance) to give the airport's view and thoughts on proposed new transport links. Obviously increased frequency on bus and rail would help, along with better marketing and South-Wales wide ticketing. Hopefully this initiative would improve the situation.

We have heard recently about the new coach service from Swansea to Bristol and agree that we do have to improve our transport links. However, surface transport links are not our priority compared with restoring flights.

Currently the Vale of Glamorgan is working on improving the Five Mile Lane on safety grounds and this will help – this will be completed by March.

4.5

Enterprise Zone

The Enterprise Zone group continues to meet regularly – it covers St Athan, the airport, BAMC and land owned by Legal and General.

Changes to the Local Development Plan have caused some slight delay in how we prepare the Master Plan but it is the intention to put this together to fit into the Local Development Plan. We hope to complete the Master Plan by the end of this Summer.

4.6

Davies Commission

Steve explained that the UK Government had set up the Davies Commission to look at the UK airport capacity. Just before Christmas, there was a submission put in to the Government to consider a Western Gateway potential to relieve Heathrow of its capacity problems, and create a sixth terminal.

A working group has been set up to look at this potential in more detail and how it could be achieved at Cardiff to relieve capacity problems elsewhere. Cardiff's runway has the capacity for extension and a low environmental footprint. Deadline for commission report is July.

Chairman - Thanks Steve, that was very interesting. Before we go any further, are there any questions from the Committee?

Arthur Paulett – Going back to your comments concerning the difference in price between BRS and CWL - just for argument's sake, I did a comparison recently on a flight from Bristol on a certain time and day and then with a flight from Cardiff at the same time and day. Bristol's flight was £610 and Cardiff's was £643. For a family of four that is a lot of money. How can that be?

SH – I agree - there is a slight difference but it all comes down to economy of scale and making a decision to fly from Bristol. You have to take in the fuel costs, bridge toll, convenience etc. We have to build up competition levels here where those prices fall because of this competitive tension, more flights, more passengers – will drive down prices.

Arthur Paulett – I suppose it's a chicken and egg syndrome?

SH – Yes, if it's Wales preferred airport, more airlines, more routes, more competition, prices will come down and passengers will have the choice they want.

Anthony Ernest – I suppose we have to generate passenger numbers of people wanting to fly out of the airport, then the airlines will follow. Are we seeing people wishing to fly from Cardiff but their needs are not fulfilled? Very important – insatiable – demand to fly to Hamburg for instance, then this will happen?

SH – We know there is passenger demand for many routes from Cardiff but there is a limit to how many risks we can cover per year. Vueling went very well and they are back with us this summer. It is our job to fill these aircraft. It goes without saying that we would like to see winter operations to Spain back here again. People want to come home to Wales and it is important we give them the opportunity to do so.

When we had more capacity when bmibaby were based here, we carried more Welsh passengers than Bristol. If we can get back to that position the numbers will reverse.

Helen Tustin – Thomas Cook supported using easyjet and it has really taken its toll on Cardiff.

SH – Now we need to base a low cost carrier and we can have the conversations with Thomas Cook again. we expect to fill these gaps but Tough economy and APD adds another concern to airlines but we keep nudging and pushing all the airlines. Vueling are here because we had a meeting with them and persisted. Airlines strategies do change and we are out there pitching for them all the time.

Dilwar Ali – have you had any progress with Emirates and Qatar Airlines?

SH – we are not on their short term plan but we will continue to pitch to them so that we stay in their minds. We were surprised by Qatar announcing Birmingham. If we do get any long haul, when it comes, it is more likely to be the American market but again, it all depends on risk.

Clive Sedgebeer – I hear recently that York Aviation recommended to the Welsh Government to support a service but that WG sat on it.

SH – I know, it is frustrating, but we must move on and not dwell on things. It is agreed that something must be done; the key is how they can help Cardiff. We need broader support for these initiatives. When we have a change of ownership, there will be a whole lot of new strategies. We will continue dealing with long haul carriers and they will have to have the risks mitigated before services start.

Anthony Ernest – Can we discuss the whole of the front of the terminal. It reminds me of the Castle Martin tank traps! The problem you have is that when the airport was designed, the security risks were not around. The amount of lamps, and posts, signs and plastic bollards – the whole area looks a mess. What that must do for the public image is unimaginable.

SH – well we now have very infrequent complaints and people seem to have got used to it.

Anthony Ernest – something needs to be done to improve the area. Perhaps it would be a good idea for members of the Committee to have a walk around the area and identify all the issues to you and what can be done? But first impressions count and these are not good.

SH – as far as the barriers are concerned - Yes, I agree they don't look good but we are the same as other airports. The barriers were there on a temporary basis as we were looking at terminal changes. WG would like to change the entire frontage, including the "waste land" outside Arrivals. As regards the kerbs and lamp-posts etc there are lots of other plans we can look at that we have already had costed. All this improvement work may take high priority under WG.

Our priority has always been to ensure that our customers are secure and safe and that the required operational needs are met. Our main expense over the last period has been on a new radar, runway and aircraft parking area maintenance – which has all taken a lot of money. The inbound arrival route is another area that we are keen to improve and will do so as funding allows.

Helen Tustin – we have a lot of complaints concerning the courtesy bus pick up area. The shelter is not big enough to hold many passengers and there have been lots of times where they are standing in the pouring rain. That's not a good customer experience.

SH – I agree but this should have stopped now as the main user of that shelter is now using our courtesy bus which drops off outside the terminal. Unfortunately, we have to segregate vehicles for safety and security. We are loath to park any traffic in the front of the terminal area. The set-down area has improved security for instance, with fewer unattended vehicles. Nevertheless, we will look at the shelter again.

Deb Barber (DB) – it is all part of the package and we are looking at it – we have got the message loud and clear.

Gwyn John – I agree with what Anthony has said about the arrival at the airport and I accept your point of view. Have you had any extra rugby supporter flights recently?

DB – Yes we have had extra flights going through, and of course we are also getting a lot of Premier football clubs now too. We pride ourselves on supporting these events and we do know we do this very well. We work closely with all the teams.

Gwyn John – are they working very closely with the tourism in the Vale?

SH – the last two Heineken Cups have been exemplary for both the airport and Cardiff City. We also work closely with Bristol on large Cup Finals and make sure that the flying programme involved is a safe operation, with protocols in place for coaching etc. Also of course the Ryder Cup – the organisers were very pleased with our processes here and said we were one of the best organised airports. We are lucky we have a skilled team here, who are rightly praised and we can build on that.

Dilwar Ali – I heard of a complaint regarding a displaced PRM being locked airside. Is this true?

SH – We have not heard of this so, firstly can I say that if any of you have a specific complaint, please come to us direct. Our disabled handling is known as being second to none, so please can you get all the details and forward to us?

DB – We work very closely with Disability Wales to ensure we are doing everything that we should have here at the airport and our team have received considerable praise for the PRM operation.

Dilwar Ali – why don't you put this in your marketing?

DB – we are working very closely with our airlines to market the service and encourage their passengers to pre-book so that we are expecting them.

Anthony Ernest – I hear that you had a major emergency recently with a Boeing 747. Would you have had the capacity to handle all those passengers?

DB – Yes, that is a big part of our emergency plan. It would be the Captains decision to off-load his passengers but we have the facilities in place to handle it.

Chairman – thanks for that Steve. Deb – anything you would like to add further?

DB – I would just like to update everybody on noise complaints and we have received only four since the last meeting. Two were related to ground running incidents at British Airways Maintenance. We do not have control over what they do, although we liaise closely with them on environmental matters. When we do have complaints we pass all details to them.

The other two noise complaints involved an RAF Tornado jet undertaking approach training into Cardiff. Military jets always attract more attention because they generate a different noise profile. We are doing all we can at the moment to increase our wider aircraft activity but we are cognisant of the impact it could have on the local community. Although we do have a lot of positive interest as well.

Chairman – there was a Chinook flying over Rhose recently which always attracts a lot of interest.

DB – yes, Cardiff is quite popular with the military and people are evidently quite keen to see military aircraft flying through.

Anthony Ernest – Is new activity at St Athan helping with that such as Hunter Aviation?

DB – Yes, sometimes. They were very keen to use us over the weekends last summer for fast jets and vintage aircraft parking, where they were being used at air displays.

Chairman – Thanks Deb. Are there any other questions from the Committee members?

5.0 Any Other Business

As there was no other business, the Chairman closed the formal part of the meeting and asked for questions from the floor.

6.0 Questions from the Floor

Clive Sedgebeer – Going back to your comments on the difference in pricing earlier Steve, that is quite correct. The more airlines, the more the competition, which drives down the prices.

Another point our friend from ABTA may want to comment on is that they incentivise their travel agents/tour operators to book flights through Bristol. A friend of mine who is a TUI shareholder went into a local TUI travel agent and asked for ideas about a weekend away from Cardiff. The member of the counter staff advised that “all the airlines have left Cardiff in the winter but we have airlines out of Bristol”. My friend was amazed and has complained to Thomson. This is quite disgraceful. When you go into a travel agent you expect good information, and not for the staff to be incentivised to book one particular product.

Helen Tustin – Sometimes we have to make commercial decisions too. There are overheads to pay, salaries. Also, you don’t know what was said exactly – if he asked the question in the wrong way or was misunderstood. I agree that counter staff should not make such comments though.

SH yes and that happens both ways. If we have a product that’s strong, this will happen less. There will always be people who will take a commercial view. We are thinking of embarking on a Choose Cardiff campaign, challenging all travel agents to give customers Cardiff. This happened when I worked at Birmingham Airport, which is hard to believe now when you see how busy Birmingham Airport is.

We simply have to improve our product but that will never stop people selling what they want to.

Clive Sedgebeer – The Vueling name is getting out there now from this campaign. When he spoke to me, Alex Cruz he said that did not like to be known as a low cost carrier but a full service carrier – which is good news. We must also drum in to the public that Barcelona has a beach! Lots of them don’t realise this, they just think it’s a city destination.

My main gripe though is that there is a new Air Malta service on tour operator booking engines – for Friday evenings through the winter. We put it out on Twitter but I was telephoned and asked to take it down. Why is that?

Spencer Birns said that it had not been confirmed by the airline. Aer Lingus is the same – they have put on extra seats per week, giving people more choice and we are not allowed to say anything about it.

SH – I know its frustrating but we cannot publicise the Air Malta until the official launch. The majority of the seats are tour operator blocked and Air Malta didn't want any PR at the moment. They are our partners and we cannot have any bad relations with them. But Cardiff unfortunately is not the biggest piece in their puzzle. It's the same with Aer Arran and the re-launch of Dublin route. You are right, you do help the airport all the time, but let's just be patient. We are consistently accused that we don't put enough good news in to the market place, so we are frustrated too but ultimately it is the airlines choice.

Clive Sedgebeer – is it because you are waiting for WG to take over?

SH – No, that is not the case.

Phil Jones – do you know that car parking charges between Cardiff and Bristol for the exact same period is more expensive at Cardiff?

SH – but it's not as straight forward as that, you cannot compare like for like, there are so many differences and also, their parking is remote, block parking for example.

Phil Jones – Austrian tourists coming into Cardiff – is this going ahead?

SH – Yes, this will operate weekly from Vienna, bringing Austrian tourists directly into Wales. Their tours are all pre-planned and it is all going ahead and it looks as if it will do very nicely. We are working with WG to bring in tourists into Wales wherever we can.

Phil Jones – are there return seats into Austria?

SH – not this year but maybe in future.

Phil Jones – I hear that there is a Greyhound coach service going to operate from Swansea, dropping into Cardiff and Newport and on to Bristol. They have nine coaches for this service.

SH – yes we are aware of it, there will be people who use it but it will not influence our operation. It will substitute the BRS Temple Meads service City Flyer to Bristol Airport. Ultimately you don't choose what airport you fly to on how you can get there. We need more public transport distributing our inbound passengers from Dublin and Edinburgh.

We have submitted to WG Task Force for an integrated transport system, asking for more choice and more frequency, and to use tickets on either the X91 or rail link service.

If you look at Bristol's figures, only 10% of passengers are arriving by public transport. Our figures show 8%, so it does show how hard it is to get people out of their cars. The Greyhound service is not the key concern – more flights are.

Helen Tustin – I believe that students are using this service too as its cheap.

Phil Jones – I noted that the Anglesey flights were not included in the CAA statistics web-page. Was it cancelled? Did it operate?

DB – yes, it flew. We had some weather disruption which may have affected one or two flights but most flights went out as normal.

SH – the figures should be on there as we did operate it. It's a very good service and WG will continue to support it.

Phil Jones – I notice that KLM are now charging for their luggage.

SH – Yes that's right, its for flights across the whole of their European networks, not just at Cardiff and we were not consulted on it. They are trying to recoup some of their losses so it will be interesting to see how this reflects in passenger concerns.

Anthony Ernest – as most of us here live in the Vale, I am interested in how much of our inbound traffic is going to stay in the local community. Are airlines promoting the Vale as opposed to the wider Wales area?

SH – I would say the wider Wales area. We are keen to support the City regions as they are a better destination to promote along the M4 corridor. The concerns I have within the Vale is that it is one of the most under-appreciated gems in the UK. Unfortunately however there is a very limited tourist infrastructure here and most people go into Cardiff due to the choice of hotels. Since we lost the Egerton Grey hotel, we have had no replacement of the same quality. This is something that we feel very strongly about.

Chairman – I must say that I cannot say that the Vale make any great effort to market themselves. The Vale is usually seen as the Garden of Cardiff, the Vale of Glamorgan is just an adjunct to Cardiff. The Vale do not really promote themselves.....

Clive Sedgebeer – I hear from Emyr Griffiths of Welsh Rarebits that not many of the Helvetic Swiss passengers stay in the Vale – they go further afield – all over Wales. There is no real Welsh tour operator in this area.

SH – yes I agree, as there is not the same selection of Welsh Rarebit quality product in the Vale.

Chairman – In all of the work that you are doing to encourage people to use the airport – are the travel agents joined up in the campaign to get more flights?

Helen Tustin – Although I have a good relationship with both Steve and Spencer, the perception is that there is not an open door policy with local travel agents.

SH - We have a new Stakeholder Engagements Plan with Cassie going forward but we would like to see more resources brought back into the airport to help in this area.

Helen Tustin – why don't you open the terminal up for an agent's familiarity tour to help them....?

SH – yes we would like to do that but over the next period there will be big investments spent on the inbound route and then we will have a new product for them to see and sell – to surprise and delight them!

Helen Tustin – Why don't we ask the young ones to come and get involved, it is always seems to be the same people. The young ones could come in and give their views?

Clive Sedgebeer – Local agents should be marketing Cardiff all the time. You should start inter-action with agents more. I know the Thirsty Thursdays have gone down well and there are more planned.

SH – have you a young selection in your company Helen? Some names that you could suggest?

Helen Tustin - Yes, I will look at it.

Anthony Ernest – there is also the Tourism Society. I shall speak to the member in South Wales and email you the details Steve. The Society covers a wide range of areas.

Chairman – Are there any other questions? None – ok well thanks Steve and Deb for all the information you have provided tonight. It's been very interesting. Perhaps at the next meeting you will have bigger and better news about the airport and we look forward to it.

Thank you all very much for coming along and for your important contribution to the meeting.

7.0 Date of Next Meeting

Monday 17th June 2013 at 6 pm in the Porthkerry Room, Cardiff Airport

Distribution:

All ACC Members
Airport Web page for information

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