

**Bristol Airport's development plans:
Updated comments from Bristol Chamber of Commerce & Initiative
– part of Business West
22 February 2021**

Introduction

1. Bristol Chamber of Commerce & Initiative operates at the centre of Business West and is the main business representation and leadership organisation for the West of England area and includes being the accredited Chambers of Commerce for North Somerset, South Gloucestershire and the wider area. We have been working on behalf of and representing businesses and employers in the region for nearly 200 years and as part of Business West represent nearly 22,000 businesses, from new start-up companies through to the major private and public employers. We are also members of the board of the West of England's Local Enterprise Partnership.
2. As a Chambers of Commerce, we are not representing any specific business interests or sector but are submitting evidence based on our independent view of the long-term economic interests of the region and the whole spectrum of businesses and employers who operate here.
3. The comments set out in this document build on our previous representations submitted in response to North Somerset Council's consultation on Bristol Airport's development plans in January 2019 which set out the broad consensus of business community support that Bristol Airport should be able to expand its passenger capacity in line with its proposals to 12 million passengers. These additional comments recognise significant changes to the external context in which the airport's proposals must be considered, both because of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on air travel, and an increased focus from our organisation and many of our members on tackling the challenge of climate change.

Bristol Airport – a regional success story

4. Bristol Airport's growth has historically been closely linked to the success of the region it serves. Until 2021, passenger numbers increased every year since 2009, when air travel across the world was hit hard by the global financial crisis. Like the West of England, Bristol Airport bounced back faster than most regional competitors, demonstrating the interdependency between economic growth and air travel.
5. Bristol Airport has developed a strong short-haul network with the number of scheduled destinations increasing significantly during this time. This has provided the frequency, flexibility and affordability required by business travellers, enabling more passengers from across the region to fly from their regional airport and reducing reliance on London airports.
6. Substantial investment in facilities, starting with the construction of a new terminal in 2000, has seen the passenger experience improve over the same period, with Bristol Airport winning several industry awards and scoring highly in customer satisfaction benchmarking programmes. As a

result, passengers using Bristol Airport have enjoyed a much-improved journey which stands comparison with airports of similarly sized cities and regions across Europe.

Economic impacts and business benefits

7. A successful regional airport supporting a wide network of scheduled flights has a positive influence on trade, inward investment and business location decisions. The ability to do business in international markets without making lengthy surface journeys to airports outside the region generates cost and time savings for companies in the West of England and the wider region. Access to Bristol Airport's route network also contributes to individuals' quality of life, helping to make the region an attractive place to live and work, particularly for international residents who may particularly value air links to friends and family around the world.
8. Bristol and the South West region have very strong international trading and business connections with key sectors that are reliant upon excellent European and global connectivity for their labour, customer base and to supplier, investor and intra-firm relationships.
9. Bristol Airport is also a significant hub of economic activity in its own right, supporting around 4,000 jobs on site and in the local supply chain. Furthermore, we note that Bristol Airport draws its employees disproportionately from south Bristol and Weston-Super-Mare, both areas in which employment opportunities with other major employers may be more limited than in other parts of the region.
10. Our members consider a successful airport is an important ingredient in the long term prosperity of our area, improving connectivity and benefiting employment. Bristol Airport also makes an important positive contribution to the regional economy as a gateway for inbound tourism. Tourism generates over £1 billion in business turnover and supports 29,000 jobs in the West of England, with international visitors staying longer and spending more on average. Bristol Airport plays an active role in raising the profile of the West of England and the South West region in overseas markets, regularly partnering with the region's destination management organisations at international trade shows and co-funding marketing campaigns.

Tackling the challenge of climate change

11. While acknowledging the strong, positive economic and social benefits Bristol Airport brings to the West of England and wider South West region, we do not ignore the very real threat posed by climate change, to which flights are a significant contributor. Bristol was the UK's first ever European Green Capital in 2015, all four of the West of England local authorities and the West of England Combined Authority have declared climate emergencies, and Bristol Chamber of Commerce & Initiative as part of Business West is itself committed to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030.
12. However, we recognise that the challenge of carbon reduction is more difficult in sectors such as aviation where practical alternatives to fossil fuels do not currently exist at scale. We acknowledge and strongly welcome Bristol Airport's continued efforts to reduce carbon emissions from its operations on the ground, but this should not deflect from the need to tackle emissions from flights.

13. For this reason, Bristol Airport's continued participation in Sustainable Aviation – the UK aviation sector's collective approach to the challenge of ensuring cleaner, quieter, smarter air travel – is essential and we urge the airport to take an even more active leadership role in this partnership, alongside other aviation businesses based in the West of England and wider South West region, including Airbus and Rolls Royce. We believe there is an opportunity for Bristol Airport to put itself at the forefront of innovation, providing a testbed for new, clean technology. While airports cannot claim to be green, by leading on sustainability Bristol Airport can align itself more closely to the values of the region it serves.

Meeting market demand in the West of England

14. While it remains unclear how quickly and fully air travel will bounce back from the impact of the global pandemic, we support in principle Bristol Airport's stated aim to better serve passengers travelling to and from the West of England and the wider South West region. We recognise the time lost and costs incurred when local business travellers have to fly from airports in the South East or Midlands, and the improved arrivals experience enjoyed by visitors flying directly into the region. Providing more destinations and improved flight schedules from Bristol Airport will help to reduce these inefficiencies.
15. Acting to address real climate change concerns by handicapping Bristol Airport and the region it serves risk being simply symbolic, channelling passengers to Heathrow, Gatwick and Birmingham instead. We acknowledge the significant contribution of aviation to the UK's emissions footprint but think tackling this needs to be undertaken by the UK government as part of a national plan for carbon emissions. Stopping development of one regional airport risks simply moving journeys elsewhere.
16. The outflow of passengers from the region described above generates additional carbon emissions through longer surface journeys, usually by road. This illustrates the danger of creating unintended consequences by constraining Bristol Airport's ability to serve its local and regional market without a consistent UK (and indeed, international) approach to aviation.
17. While meeting market demand makes sense in the short-term, we encourage Bristol Airport to review its long-term Master Plan proposals for development up to 20 million passengers per annum. Once it becomes clear whether and to what extent changes in work and travel patterns created by the pandemic are temporary or permanent, further work is required to evaluate at what point Bristol Airport will be 'right sized' for the region. This long-term approach should seek to shift the focus from capacity and growth to quality and impact, encompassing all aspects of Bristol Airport's operations including surface transport connections (where we are supportive of proposals for a mass transit network connection).

An airport for the future

18. We remain committed to working with Bristol Airport to ensure the West of England and wider region stays well connected to the world while actively addressing the significant challenges the aerospace and aviation industry faces in adapting to meet the UK's net zero target and decarbonise. We will continue to support and work with Bristol Airport on its journey to net zero, including challenging and encouraging the airport and the region to go further and faster to reduce the carbon impact in line with the ambitions of the region. We are well placed to facilitate

partnerships with low-carbon technology and clean energy companies which can help Bristol Airport achieve its ambitions to be a world-leading regional airport and ensure it remains a valued asset to the West of England and regional economy for years to come.

19. We respectfully ask the Inspector to support the Airport's growth as set out in its planning application and allow this appeal.