

BCCI Statement on Bristol Airport Expansion – July 2021

My name is James Durie and as the Chief Executive of Bristol Chamber of Commerce which operates at the centre of Business West – I am speaking today on behalf of our members in favour of the proposals by Bristol Airport to enhance and grow its capacity up to 12m passengers a year in a sustainable and measured way.

As the leading voice and resource for business in the Bristol, West of England and wider region including North Somerset, where we are based, we represent over 22,000 businesses and employers from the smallest to the largest and across all sectors.

Bristol Airport is part of the UK's national infrastructure and an important regional hub and gateway for international connectivity, bringing visitors and investors to the region and allowing businesses to connect with customers domestically and across the world.

Our members consider a successful airport is an important ingredient in the long term prosperity of our area, improving connectivity and benefiting employment- and so is a critical part of our regional transport infrastructure and our global connectivity.

We recognise that sustaining a successful regional airport that operates a wide network of scheduled flights has a positive influence on trade, inward investment and business location decisions. And the ability to do business in international markets, in a post-Brexit environment, without having to make lengthy surface journeys, often by car, to airports outside the region saves considerable cost, time and surface miles. Constraining this region's main airport with this application risks cutting businesses off from the world or forcing them to use airports outside the region putting the region at a competitive disadvantage.

Access to Bristol Airport's route network also contributes to individuals' quality of life, helping to make the region an attractive place to live, work and visit, particularly for international residents who may particularly value air links to friends and family around the world. Bristol and the wider region has 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 for supplier, investor and intra-firm relationships.

We do recognise that aviation is currently a significant contributor to carbon emissions and that change is needed in the industry in order to reduce its overall carbon impact. We welcome the publication last week of the Government's Transport Decarbonisation plan. Businesses and employers across our region are committed to meeting net zero targets and significant investment will be required to meet these targets supported by business growth. And an expansion of Bristol airport will facilitate growth whilst allowing the investment required to meet the target of a net zero airport.

We also recognise that Bristol Airport is demonstrating that it is actively working to reduce carbon emissions arising from its own operations and has clearly set out its ambition to be the greenest airport in the country, including with this expansion plan, by becoming carbon neutral for direct emissions 4 years ahead of its previous target and a Net Zero airport by 2030. And further now moved to put itself and our region at the forefront of innovation, providing a testbed for new, clean technology.

We know there is much more to do right across the aerospace and aviation sectors which have a major footprint in this region, but also have major ambitions and continuing investment to do just this.

We are encouraged by the commitments made by Bristol Airport through Jet Zero and Sustainable Aviation and also that government and industry are committed to more long term investment, innovation and interventions to decarbonise.

Carbon reduction is part of a broader challenge for all businesses, where reductions in carbon are needed across all economic sectors and other sources of emissions, from energy to transport, food and beyond.

For us to achieve these carbon reduction goals, we need a coherent government plan for reducing carbon emissions to hit our international targets and limit the impact of Climate Change. This has to be done nationally by the UK government. Reducing carbon will involve economic costs, trade-offs and interventions, that need to be managed and agreed nationally.

We don't believe we can have the UK's aviation policy and its climate strategy done in an un-coordinated way by a single local authority planning committee. If this happens, it would damage our regional connectivity, whilst broadly shifting the carbon problem elsewhere, as the number of flights grew in other locations. The recent decision at Stansted show that the expansion of the UK's airport capacity is already happening elsewhere, at a scale much larger than that proposed in the Bristol application.

For this reason, we do not think an ad hoc decision to limit aviation capacity only at Bristol Airport by one local authority is the right way to proceed. A decision to limit or reduce flying should be taken by national government as part of a broader democratic process, alongside a coherent national carbon reduction plan.

As part of the proposals we strongly support the Airport's plans to implement new public transport targets and new bus and coach services, alongside improvements to the A38 are welcomed by businesses in the region. Improved sustainable transport links to the airport will increase connectivity and enhance business use of the airport.

Bristol Airport is a significant hub of economic activity in its own right, supporting 000s of jobs on site and across local supply chains. Furthermore, we note that Bristol Airport draws its employees disproportionately from south Bristol and Weston-Super-Mare, both areas in which employment opportunities are more limited than in other parts of the region. The planned development and additional passenger volumes through the airport are projected to add 710 direct jobs at the Airport and move to increase indirect jobs to 5,000 across the region, and deliver an estimated £430 m to the SW region and South Wales economy at a challenging time for this sector and indeed our national economy.

On behalf of our members we therefore support Bristol Airport's appeal against North Somerset Council's decision to refuse permission to increase and enhance its capacity to accommodate passengers to 12m per annum. We hope these plans are ultimately approved so the airport can then move forward its plans which will benefiting businesses and local people alike for the long term.

James Durie
Chief Executive of Bristol Chamber of Commerce