

**Statement of support for Bristol Airport expansion plan by John Mayer.
(Area lead for Somerset and Wiltshire, Federation of Small Businesses) July 2021**

“Good morning,

My name is John Mayer, and I am here today to represent the Federation of Small Businesses – the FSB - in the South West and speak in favour of the proposals by Bristol Airport to enhance their capacity in a sustainable and measured way.

The FSB has members across the whole country and is the biggest business representation group in the UK and I am speaking today on behalf of the local South West region of the FSB and specifically the area’s most directly affected by the airport in Somerset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and the West of England.

My role within the group is as the senior FSB elected representative for Somerset and Wiltshire and on a personal level, I run an accountancy business locally and my company is based in North Somerset, an area where I am also very proud to live.

As you can imagine it has been a very tough year indeed for all small businesses in the region, many of which have struggled to survive. With more than 88 per cent of businesses in the West of England region defined as being micro - that means they have 10 employees or less – it is clear that unless SMEs can bounce back strongly our whole economy will suffer hugely. Therefore, we feel it is essential we have all the tools in place to aid our recovery and continued growth and one key element of this framework is our physical connectivity, of which the airport is a vital component.

At a time when being open for business has never been more important, supporting the sustainable growth of our regional gateway will send a strong signal that we continue to welcome trade, tourism and investment from overseas to the benefit of the SME owners across every sector we represent.

We know that a significant proportion of the regional small businesses - who are the driving force in our economy - rely heavily on business, hospitality and leisure visitors and having a thriving airport capable of offering direct flights from vital areas like the Middle East and North America can only help those businesses look to the future with renewed confidence.

And it is not just about helping these and other businesses to recover from the pandemic in the short term - it is about ensuring they have a sustainable business in the medium to long term as well. We have so many wonderful places in this region that people from outside our area want to visit and enjoy – and thousands of jobs attached to them too – so the additional opportunities provided by an expansion of the airport’s capacity for trade, investment and tourism in the region - and the 5,000 new jobs that will be created – must, we hope, be given appropriate weight in consideration of the issues surrounding this appeal.

The airport is of course also a vital business tool for all our local importers and exporters as well but obviously not all small businesses are directly affected by airport trade. However, what defines a small business is its local presence and local commitment and our members are active parts of their local communities too and clearly value the ease of quick and easy access to international and domestic connectivity. However, at the moment, that access is more limited than it should be.

We have heard that nearly 8 million passengers a year are forced to go elsewhere at the moment for their flights which as well as being inconvenient simply cannot be good for the environment. Far too much business and personal air traffic is lost to other airports – some hundreds of miles away – which can only add to the regional/national carbon footprint as well as taking away many economic benefits from a local area that urgently needs them. An expanded Bristol Airport will clearly help reduce those numbers and we are also encouraged that the airport is looking at improved coach and bus services to help customers' access its facilities. We want to see people travel to their local airport rather than a distant one and to do so in as green and clean a way as possible and these plans should help in that regard.

Talking of the green agenda, the FSB and its membership take the Net Zero and Climate Change issue very seriously and we have been encouraged by the serious steps the airport has taken to address the understandable environmental concerns expressed by many local people and businesses alike.

We are pleased to see that Bristol Airport, has declared an ambitious aim to be the greenest airport in the country even with this expansion plan and when they recently promised to deliver Net Zero by 2030 - 20 years ahead of the government's target - it showed a further, bold public commitment to embrace this vital subject. The fact it has already achieved carbon neutrality four years ahead of schedule is also a positive sign.

The FSB has attended many local events with stakeholders about Net Zero in recent times and we are pleased to see the airport is always present and always tries to address any concerns raised. The FSB in the South West believes this subject is very important for us all and we can see the airport feels the same which is one of the reasons why we feel confident to support their planned extension.

In conclusion, the Government has expressed a strong commitment to levelling up growth and improving localism and it is clear it can help do so for this region by allowing Bristol Airport the opportunity to reach its full potential.

We believe well-considered, well-planned and environmentally conscious schemes like Bristol Airport's expansion plans are what is needed to help propel Bristol, North Somerset, the West of England and indeed the wider South West forward economically and provide a genuinely improved and much-needed service for hundreds of thousands of people who value their local airport.

Therefore, the FSB supports the appeal against North Somerset Council's decision to refuse permission to raise the number of Bristol Airport passengers to 12 million per annum. We hope these plans are ultimately approved so the airport can then move onto the next phase of its journey for the good of businesses and local people alike."

John Mayer, FSB and North Somerset business owner and resident

Footnote – At the enquiry John was asked by one of the observers about how we decided on our stance. It was an executive decision based on various discussions as opposed to formal surveys as explained for clarity here by FSB Development Manager for Gloucestershire, Bristol and Bath Sam Holliday on the next page...

“The way the FSB works, as a member led organisation, is the membership elect people to represent an area (in a similar way to MPs and their constituencies) and they are then, in effect, mandated to make decisions on behalf of the local electorate as is often the case with organisations like ourselves.

“The decision to back these particular plans was therefore based on an executive decision by the senior members in our region - supported by local staff - following discussions among ourselves and with members over the course of the past few months and indeed years. It is not usually our policy to have official local surveys about every policy issue - the FSB does do these nationally, but this is a very much a localised issue – and the executive leadership locally therefore made this decision on behalf of our membership. We are aware that not all our members may have agreed with our position, and we fully respect that but that is often the case with key policy decisions. We did this in good faith and with the hope we were capturing the mood of many of our members who may be interested in the scheme.

“This decision has the backing of the two most senior FSB volunteer leaders in the areas most closely affected - those in the West of England Combined Authority area and in North Somerset - as well as the backing of our South West regional chairman who lives in Bristol. In addition, our decision to back the airport plans were shared with the wider South West FSB volunteer leadership group which also offered its support. The decision therefore is from the local executive leadership of the FSB in the areas most closely affected by the airport.

“Before arriving at a decision in early 2020 we actively encouraged our members to share their views on the process with the planners (including using our weekly Email newsletter called Bitesize which goes out to the wider Bristol area every Wednesday) and we then informed our members, again via Bitesize, about plans to actively support the campaign and received no negative responses from our statement. At that point we had signed a joint letter of support with the CBI which was shared as a press statement by the airport and again we had no direct negative responses from our members which made us feel we were hopefully on the right track. The article in our Bitesize newsletter announcing our initial support is below from Feb 5, 2020”.

Sam Holliday, FSB



Local News

FSB backs Bristol Airport expansion plans

The FSB's regional team has given its backing to Bristol Airport's plans to expand their current operation to allow for more than two million extra passengers in the coming years. We have signed a joint letter with the CBI to say we believe this is good for the South West economy and businesses of all sizes in the area. While backing the bid - which goes before North Somerset Council next week - we are also calling on the airport to improve transport links and to stick to an ambitious target to get to carbon neutrality as quick as possible. You can see the joint letter [here](#).

