

## **West Midlands Regional Assembly – Regional Planning Body**

This report has been prepared on behalf of the West Midlands Regional Assembly, the Regional Planning Body, as technical advice to inform the Regional Spatial Strategy Revision process. It is one of a suite of technical reports commissioned to inform the development of spatial policy as part of Phase Two of the Revision of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy.

Every effort has been made to verify and check the contents of this report including all figures and tables. However the West Midlands Regional Assembly can not accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies.

Further information and details of the West Midlands Regional Strategy and the Revision process can be found on our web site [www.wmra.gov.uk](http://www.wmra.gov.uk)

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Dear Mr Davenport,

### Introduction

The Minister of State's letter that accompanies the Regional Spatial Strategy for the West Midlands highlights Airport policy as an area that should be the subject to the RSS revision in the context of the publication of the Air Transport White Paper. Atkins were asked to review the existing and potential roles of the following sites:

- ◆ Birmingham International Airport;
- ◆ Coventry Airport;
- ◆ Wolverhampton Airport; and
- ◆ RAF Cosford.

This letter summarises the Review undertaken.

### Comments on the White Paper

The White Paper notes that, at the time, less than half the air passengers travelling to or from the Midlands use the regions' airports. With the overall market for air travel in the Midlands due to grow substantially, an opportunity exists to claw back a proportion of this leaking traffic and reduce the number of distance journeys made – mainly by car. In order to make the maximum advantage of this market opportunity, greater route destination coverage will need to be developed in the region. Currently only one airport, BIA, has the capability of achieving this.

The White Paper identifies the need for an extra runway to be built in the region and proposes that it should be built at BIA based upon proposals developed by the airport. The option for the construction of a new airport, as proposed in the consultation process, is not supported. With respect to the other two airports in the West Midlands Region, Coventry and Wolverhampton, the White Paper comments on the continuation of their existing roles. It also refers to the planning application for a terminal development at Coventry. It suggests that there could be potential to develop Cosford dependant upon the RAF's decision on spare capacity.

### Birmingham International Airport

#### *Traffic Forecasts*

Prior to its new Master Plan, BIA has published, in line with DfT guidance, a "High Level Statement of Intent" which includes forecasts. These forecasts for traffic differ from those

published in the White Paper. Whilst the passenger forecasts are about the same the ATMs<sup>1</sup> are different (i.e. lower) this is down to mainly the growth of the low cost market but also to the use of larger aircraft. The end result of this is could be a delay the requirement for a new runway by some 4 to 5 years.

With a Night Flying Policy, and EMA's strength in the freight sector, where night activity is important, BIA is not strong in the dedicated air cargo market. However, with the development of an increased number of routes (and with a longer runway) "belly hold" cargo business will expand.

### *Master Planning*

BIA has published a High Level Statement of Intent and intends to commence a consultation process on its draft Master Plan in summer 2005.

### *Extension to the existing runway*

The current Main Runway could be extended by approximately 400m to the South East (as proposed in BIA's existing Master Plan) prior to the construction of the second runway. The proposal includes the provision of a starter strip and would necessitate realignment and tunnelling of the A45 dual carriageway. This extension would improve the runway's capability and allow a wider range of long haul destinations to be served directly from BIA.

### *Airfield and Terminal Development*

BIA have drawn up initial plans to expand the passenger terminal facilities, the taxiways and the aircraft parking areas, ancillary facilities (including a new Air Traffic Control Tower) and improve the airport infrastructure.

### *Potential second runway*

The second runway would be the largest single investment in the airport's expansion programme. It would provide the extra capacity to meet the forecasts in the White Paper. Inevitably a development of this nature will require a robust business case.

### *Airfield and Airspace Capacity*

BIA has serious concerns over the expansion of Coventry and objected to the Coventry planning application for a new passenger terminal. This planning application is now to be the subject of an Inquiry following an appeal by Coventry Airport. NATS have been commissioned to examine the airspace issues and advise on the impact of any potential conflicts between.

### *Surface Access*

BIA is well located for public transport access being adjacent to the West Coast Main Railway line with its own station served by local and inter city services. It is also well connected to the motorway network. BIA is currently undertaking a Surface access Study. The RTS presently includes a public transport target for BIA and the white paper sets a long term target of 25% mode share by public transport.

### *Environmental Issues*

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<sup>1</sup> Air Transport Movement (ATM)

An Environmental Baseline Review has been carried out as a first stage in an Environmental Assessment.

## **Coventry Airport**

As a consequence of the Inquiry into enforcement action over an interim passenger terminal it was not possible to discuss the airport's aspirations with the airport's planning management.

### *Airport Operator*

Coventry Airport is now operated by TUI, who own Thomsonfly.com the principal operator provides low cost scheduled services to a number of destinations. Thomsonfly are in the charter and low cost market sector. Thomsonfly also operates holiday charter flights from BIA.

### *Traffic Forecasts*

It is understood that current plans are to apply for an annual passenger throughput of 2 million passengers per annum.

### *Expansion Plans*

In September 2004 planning permission was refused for a planning application for the erection of a new terminal for up to 2 million passengers per annum (mppa) at Coventry Airport, together with associated works. A public inquiry will commence on 10 January 2006. A second application for a new terminal building (2 mppa) is currently with the local planning authority and is unlikely to be determined before September 2005.

A separate public inquiry will conclude in July 2005 into the use of buildings at Coventry airport as a passenger terminal (up to 0.98 mppa). The buildings were erected without planning consent from the local planning authority and the use has continued to operate during the inquiry.

### *Surface Access*

The main access restriction is would appear to be the A45/A46 "Toll Bar " roundabout. The impact on this junction will depend on the busy hour/busy day requirements of the Thomsonfly schedules. Generally, weekday peaks in aircraft arrivals/departures coincide with normal rush hour road traffic peaks and it is likely that, if Coventry achieves its traffic goals, alterations to this junction will be required, Public transport access will need to be improved.

### *Air Space Issues*

Coventry does not recognise that its plans will have any significant impact on the management of local airspace. However, given that, by its nature, the Thomsonfly operations have inbuilt peaks and that these will coincide with those of Birmingham, it is difficult to envisage a scenario whereby future traffic into and out of both airports would not need to be jointly controlled. (I.e. flying programmes would have to be co-ordinated and procedures enhanced to deal with unplanned conflict) Work is currently underway by the National Air Traffic Services for

BIA and Coventry Airport, to investigate the extent of any airspace conflict and the ability to manage and/or mitigate this.

## *Environmental Issues*

Warwick DC have considered a draft agreement that should overcome most issues. The airport operator and the local planning authority have been positively seeking to resolve these, and other issues, outside of the inquiry. On 4 July 2005, Warwick District Council planning committee considered a package of control, mitigation and compensation measures offered by the appellant (in connection with the current enforcement inquiry) to be reasonable and as such the existing unauthorised operation (0.98mppa) to be acceptable. Furthermore, they considered that the package on offer was capable of variation to accommodate the additional impact of the appeal application (2 mppa).

## **Wolverhampton Airport**

Wolverhampton is owned by City Hoppers Airports Ltd. CHAL is an expanding airport owner and operator company. It currently operates three airports, Wolverhampton, Blackpool and Biella in northern Italy.

## *Airport Development Plan*

CHAL wish to expand the facilities at Wolverhampton to be able to handle ½ million outbound passengers per year, to achieve this they would need to build a small passenger terminal and supporting facilities and increase the length of the runway. (i.e. a new runway). Once the new runway is built, CHAL plan to close the other two runways (04-22 and 10-28) and use the land freed to develop support facilities for the airport including car parks and expanded fixed and rotary wing aircraft parking.

## *Surface Access*

The airport site is not directly adjacent to a principal road or frequent bus service. As a consequence any development would require an improvement in surface access.

## *Environmental Issues*

On environmental issues, CHAL point out that by closing two runways they will reduce noise impact in the local area and that the realigned of runway 16-34 will in itself, reduce the impacts by affecting less local buildings. In addition, they plan to designate specific routes and routes out for rotary aircraft designed to minimise local disturbance. Based upon the drawing tabled at the meeting, the construction of a new runway will take up considerable land to the south of the existing aerodrome boundary and is likely to involve the felling of a number of trees: it may even require the demolition of some buildings.

## **RAF Cosford**

RAF Cosford is an aerodrome in two parts split by a railway line. The flying element is on one side, with RAF the base complex on the other. The air side is used for basic flying training and could easily be split from the main station and used as a civil aerodrome. In the late spring of 2005 there did not appear any intent to do this, but it must be noted that the defence estate is under continual review with the purpose of reducing expenditure. The runway at RAF Cosford and the immediate surrounding area present limited opportunities for creating a thriving airport.

The main opportunities would appear to be for GA and GA maintenance, and possibly flying training.

The airfield is well located being close to the M54 and the local railway station.

## **Air Traffic Conflict**

There is a potential conflict with air traffic between aircraft operating into and out of BIA and an increase in traffic at Coventry. It could well affect BIA's ability to expand and develop services to a wider range of destinations, which in turn could result in the construction of the second runway being unviable in business terms. Currently Coventry's can operate around BIA traffic and cargo at night when BIA is not operating; there is no conflict. However, no further comment can be made until the NATS modelling has been carried out. The same will be true for Wolverhampton but to a much lesser degree because of the runway alignments and the greater separation.

## **Conclusions**

This review has been based upon a desktop review of the documents available and discussions with a number of stakeholders. As such no detailed analysis has been undertaken and it is intended to suggest areas that will need more detailed investigation in support of the development of policy. In particular a separate and more extensive study into the Regional Economic Impact of Airports is being separately undertaken by York Aviation.

Based upon our analysis BIA appears to be the only regional airport that can achieve a significant impact in clawing back the leakage of passenger traffic to airports outside the region. It also has the benefit of direct access to the rail network. However, there are a number of surface access issues that will need to be resolved to cater for increasing passenger numbers.

In order to create a long haul capability at BIA and thus reduce traffic leakage, the current runway will need to be extended by 400m and the A45 realigned.

Work is currently underway by the National Air Traffic Services for BIA and Coventry Airport, to investigate the extent of any airspace conflict and the ability to manage and/or mitigate this

Further development at both Coventry and Wolverhampton airports should be in line with the spirit of the White Paper, and RSS policy T11 and its focus on the development of BIA. In the late spring of 2005 there did not appear to be any intention on the part of the RAF to develop the flying element of RAF Cosford.

Strategic surface access, economic, and environmental issues need to be investigated further.

Yours sincerely,

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