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PLANNING HQ ADMIN

14 January 2005

Department of the Environment
Planning Service Headquarters Admin Section
2nd Floor, Millennium House
17-25 Great Victoria Street
BELFAST
BT2 7BN

Dear Sirs

“Review” of the Planning Agreement dated 22 January 1997 between BCA and the Department

We refer to the letter sent by our solicitors (Johns Elliot) dated 20 December 2004 and our letter dated 07 January 2005 and write to you without prejudice to the contentions of those letters and the matters therein raised.

As we explained in our letter of 07 January, any “review” of the Planning Agreement which affects the terms upon which BCA operates its airport requires a Public Inquiry to undertake a thorough examination of all material local and strategic issues.

In order for any sensible decision to be made on any of the planning restrictions it is essential that:

- a) Forecast passenger growth and ATM increases be clearly understood, in particular where the growth is coming from. Variation in aircraft size is also a critical issue.
- b) The impact of such growth on the environment, noise, traffic and infrastructure.
- c) The practicality of such increases in terms of runway capacity, bias of take offs, maximum number of movements per hour.

Without the above ‘business case’ and its impact on the entire region it is not sensible to make any decision on planning, Such an exercise should be carried out now – not after the event, especially as the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee are currently reviewing aviation strategy for Northern Ireland.

We write to set out our position on some of the material issues which fall to be addressed. We will not attempt an exhaustive catalogue and recognise that others will raise separate concerns. We have prepared several Appendices which should be read with this letter which summarise the concerns of Belfast International Airport.

Breaches of Good Practice and the Planning Agreement Restrictions

It is our view that BCA has breached the terms of the Planning Agreement. We would highlight the following:

1. **Seats for Sale:** Appendix 1 shows the annual cap on the seats to be offered for sale has been broken. This analysis is based strictly upon seat capacity and frequency of service as currently offered for sale on websites of BCA's scheduled customer airlines for the Winter 2004/05 and Summer 2005 seasons. We would be happy to explain in detail the basis of our analysis – the full detail of which is attached.
2. **Operating Hours:** Appendix 2 is drawn from news media coverage which demonstrates the breaches of restrictions imposed. The clear breach of night-time flight curfew outlined herein does not tally with the statement made in the 6 July submission to DOE where BCA stated: ".....growth interests of the airport are not best served by applying for a change in the operating hours." The curfew is a constraint in name only, a sanction that is rendered ineffective through the inability of the Department to 'police' it.

Despite the terms of DRD's "Good Practice Guide" on management of aircraft noise disturbance, current performance by BCA is at odds with WHO Guidelines: See Appendix 3 media coverage and Minutes of Evidence to the NI Affairs Committee (Appendix 3a).

BCA Submission of 6 July 2004

In Appendix 4 we set forth a detailed critique of the BCA Submission dated 6 July 2004 and subsequently substantiated on 25 August 2004.

BCA Press Statements

We have also enclosed a chronological catalogue of statements attributed to Belfast City Airport in recent years illustrating a departure from original commitments about its operational plans and relationship with BIA. This is outlined in Appendix 5.

Implications of changing the Seats for Sale Restriction

BCA's desire to increase (or abolish) the seats for sale restriction could lead to significant consequences both locally and strategically. In the event that the seats for sale limit is lifted, the result could be more passengers in more and larger aircraft, which would affect sustainability of services operating at both airports.

We commissioned Mott MacDonald consultants to consider the facilities at BCA and produce a report assessing the potential impact of additional activity at the BCA site. Many of their findings are reflected in the comments which we offer within this submission, and are highlighted in the critique of the BCA submission (Appendix 4).

A full report is available which goes into technical matters further highlighting issues too complicated to cover within this summary.

Allowing BCA to increase its activities until it reaches the limit of its facilities (the outcome of removing the seats for sale restriction) could lead to consequences which include the following:

LOCAL

1. Significant expansion of noise levels due to increased activity and alteration to average aircraft size.
2. Increased road traffic on the local network.
3. Approaches: As larger aircraft are deployed, due to the technical requirement for spacing between jet movements, the flight path bias over Belfast Lough will be harder to maintain. Consequently, more aircraft will fly over neighbouring residential areas. Lengthening the runway through additional starter strips (even if it were feasible which we do not accept due to the inherent physical constraints in place at the city end of the runway) would not solve the problem since it would mean lower flight paths over neighbouring residential areas.

STRATEGIC

According to the published policies of your Department, you acknowledge the need to recognise and maintain a proper balance between BIA and BCA: BIA is N Ireland's major airport, its trunk route provider and its international gateway whereas BCA plays a complementary role as a regional airport. To allow the proposed increase in activity at BCA will worsen the imbalance to the hurt of BIA, the aviation industry as a whole and the public interest at large. With

regard to the impact on the industry as a whole and the detriment to the public, the damage flowing from the dysfunctional relationship is illustrated by the loss of air routes over the last decade shown in Appendix 6. The contrast with Dublin is marked: NI lost 55 routes whereas the Dublin has lost 18. The difference is due to the effective control exercised by the authorities in the Republic to make sure that the aviation industry as a whole is protected for the public good.

Public Inquiry

As we have previously explained, the issues in play require a Public Inquiry where we will gladly contribute and expand on the matters which concern us as summarised herein.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Harrison'.

ALBERT HARRISON
Managing Director