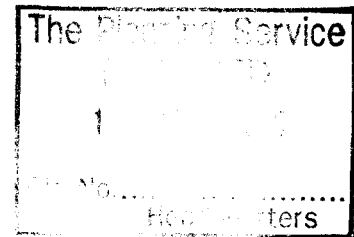




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Belfast BT4 3XX

To: BCA
Planning Agreement Consultation
Planning Service Headquarters Admin. Section
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17-25 Great Victoria Str.
Belfast
BT2 7BN

DATE RECEIVED
17 JAN 2005



From: Esmond Birnie MLA (South Belfast) PLANNING HQ ADMIN

12 January 2005

Objection to proposed change to Belfast City Airport Planning Agreement

1. I accept that the Belfast City Airport is a valuable source of jobs (currently 800 on site) and may also add to consumer choice regarding air travel from and to the Province. That said, I am concerned that any change in the 1997 planning agreement would lead to social costs outweighing the social benefits.
2. My concerns (which reflect those of some constituents in South Belfast) relate to the following possible social costs arising from further expansion at the City:
 - Noise levels (what independent acoustic advice will the Department be employing to assess the impact of existing and likely future airport activity particularly on residential areas in South and East Belfast and North Down?)
 - Increased road traffic to and from the airport from the north, south and west of the Province which would have to be channelled through the already congested roads network in central Belfast
 - The safety implications of increased over-flights over the Belfast urban area.
3. Given the above, I do not think the question of “seats offered for sale” can be treated as simply narrow technical variable. There will be much broader social consequences from any large scale expansion at the airport. These would merit an Article 31 inquiry.
4. It also legitimate for government to take a view on the relationship between the two main airports in Northern Ireland (City and International) and whether the proposed expansion at the City will help or hinder the airports industry in Northern Ireland as a whole to compete against Dublin. (During 1995-2003 Dublin passenger numbers doubled from 8 m. to 16 m. whereas the combined growth at the “two Belfast airports” was from 3.6 m. to 5.9 m.—some of Dublin’s growth came from Northern Ireland residents and that airport is indicating an expansion to 44 m. by 2030)
5. My constituents would like more clarity as to how any removal of the “cap” on seats for sale is likely to impact on the scale of aircraft movements over our city (particularly of larger and noisier planes--- see answer 5 in Mr Ambrose’s

letter to Mr McBride of 25 August 2004) and also the impact on the bias to approaches and climb outs over Belfast Lough (during 2003 varying between 55 and 72 per cent which implies that as many as 45 per cent of flights were coming over the built-up area).

6. I note that BCA assume 3 per cent growth annually in passenger numbers over the years to 2018. It is worth noting that such 3 per cent growth if sustained over 22 years (i.e. 2004-2026) would double passenger numbers to close to 4.5 m. within not much more than two decades. As question 9 in Mr McBride's letter to Mr Ambrose of 28 July 2004 implies there is an apparent contradiction between the BCA prediction of 3 m. passengers in 2018 and then a separate statement that passenger numbers will increase by 50 per cent over the next ten years (2004 passenger could have been as high as 2.2 m.).

Edward Binie