

Minutes of the Cross-Party Group on Aviation

30 November 2021

18:30 – 19:30

Virtual Meeting – Zoom / Join by phone

MSPs attendees:

Paul McLellan MSP
Graham Simpson MSP
Beatrice Wishart MSP
Sharon Dowey MSP
Rhoda Grant – MSP

Non-MSPs attendees:

Henk van Klaveren – AOA
Luke Petherbridge – ABTA
Caroline Donaldson – Barrhead Travel
Roddie MacPhee – ABTA Scotland
Janice Hogarth – SPAA
Josh Croft – UK Inbound
Greg Maxwell – Edinburgh Airport
Brian McClean – Glasgow Airport
Tracy Docherty – If Only
Ross Southgate – BALPA
Josh Hill – Parliamentary adviser

Welcome and Apologies

The meeting was opened by Graham Simpson who as Co-chair would be chairing this meeting and alternating with Paul McLellan who would chair the next meeting. It was agreed that subsequent meetings should be a mix of virtual and in person meetings

The aims of the CPG would be to produce reports to be submitted to Scottish Government and to review the recommendations that came from these reports.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from last meeting had been circulated and were to basically create the office bearers for the group and these were approved.

Presentation from Airport Operators Association on Sustainability

A very comprehensive presentation was given by Henk Van Klavaren of the AOA giving an update on the current levels of emissions globally and domestically and pointing out that airlines are slower to decarbonise and it will be tough to reach net zero by 2050 and that the production of sustainable aviation fuel is expensive and there is currently not a great deal immediately available.

Henk discussed the current sustainable aviation decarbonisation Road Map and the effects that would result from the Air Space Change Programme with the introduction of the Free Routes Airspace in Scotland from December. There are opportunities in Scotland in places such as Grangemouth to become a centre for the production of SAF utilising the knowledge from those involved in the oil and gas sector.

Sustainable fuel is already being produced from household waste but there is much more that will be required to help aviation achieve its goal of Net Zero by 2050 from technical innovation including aircraft design. It is fair to say that smaller aircraft will be the first ones to achieve this and Loganair is well advanced in looking at smaller potentially electric aircraft. It should also be noted that the right part of carbon must be removed.

The airports have a big part to play in this as well and they are working hard to reach their targets and projects such as wind farms will help their already list of projects to reduce their emissions.

Scotland is well placed with the expertise it has through their oil and gas industry.

Brian Maclean from Glasgow Airport agreed with Henk that there was a real opportunity to create a test bed via hydroelectric power and he identified 3 plants in Scotland that could be developed and added that this would create jobs. The St Fergus Carbon Capture project could be very significant in reducing emissions.

The Scottish Government aviation strategy paper that had been produced had raised a number of items in relation to moving to net zero and sustainable aviation and it was also noted that sustainable fuels were mentioned in the Union Connectivity review

Presentation on the journey to be taken for the recovery of the travel sector

Janice Hogarth gave a presentation on the recovery plan needed across the whole industry combining outbound and inbound travel and highlighted the value to the Scottish economy.

The outbound sector was broken down into leisure high street agencies, homeworkers and also business travel who were all struggling to survive with no new business or income. The ongoing changes in regulations and vaccinations was causing chaos and draining any confidence by passengers to travel. They are so confused over the regulations and are unable to complete their documentation either pre departure or lack the ability to complete their passenger locator forms to come home, resulting in delays at airports and denied boarding.

Recruitment was highlighted as a major ongoing challenge at the moment which will continue to present issues over the coming years. The retail industry had lost a large number of highly trained and specialist knowledge people which will be very difficult to replace. Many have left the industry due to the uncertainty of ongoing employment and many cannot face the onslaught of trying to deal with passengers with the ever-changing regulations etc

Ultimately there needs to be a clear roadmap which needs to be created now. The travel industry works so far ahead which means that decisions need to be taken by airlines on which route they fly, tour operators (both inbound and outbound) on the travel programmes they will operate, at least twelve months ahead. So even if we are unable to predict the future, we at least need to be prepared to look at how we can all recover and we need to do this in a co-ordinated fashion.

Scotland and the rest of the UK needs to catch up with the rest of Europe in the recovery of travel as they are lagging well behind. The recovery for the sector will be slow which means that passenger traffic will not return to 2019 levels until at least 2023.

There are already a great number of forward bookings made for next year which are either made up of rebooked holidays or new holidays. Confidence was beginning to grow but the reaction at the weekend of the changes plus the comments from Government accelerated the usual press frenzy and many passengers are left feeling wobbly.

There needs to be a fully recognised plan in place for everyone to work from to allow people to travel and there needs to be a fully integrated system of required paperwork.

Everyone needs to all work together to make this happen in collaboration.

Greg Maxwell from Edinburgh airport commented on the problems for Aviation in Scotland and then need for proactive engagement with all parties to help the recovery. Gordon Dewar was chairing a Scottish Aviation Group in conjunction with the clinicians which was having some success but needed quicker and more positive action to help the industry

Brian McClean talked about the fragility of connectivity with less aircraft being based at Scottish Airport which was creating reductions in flight options for Scottish travellers and potentially sending them south of the Border.

Karen Musgrave of Barrhead Travel talked about the need for a four nations approach as she added that their Scottish Retail outlets were suffering more than their English counterparts and there was no financial support to help and they were basically reassuring customers on existing bookings rather than taking in new business.

Luke Petherbridge from ABTA commented that there had been no recovery in the Summer and that the October holidays had been hampered by the lateral flow tests. He also commented on the dire situation for the companies who booked Schools and Youth groups and added that already 50% of jobs had disappeared in this area.

Tracy Docherty from Tour Operator If Only based in Glasgow talked about the level of cancellations and the fact that they had no income whilst they were having to pay £100,00 a month in rent and rates. Forward forecasting was incredibly difficult.

Joss Croft of UK Inbound added that inbound tourism was worth £2.5 billion and was the third largest export and that they were currently -93% on 2019 figures. Overseas visitors spend far more than domestic tourists and other deterrents apart from the cost of PCR tests came from the high cost of visas, high levels of APD and the 2nd highest level of VAT. Additional funding was needed to help this sector.

It was agreed to try and produce a report which covered the challenges and solutions facing the varying aspects of the travel industry with a solution being to create a report for the next meeting in January

Annual Business Plan

The aim of the group was to create an Annual Business Plan which would be discussed and formulated further at the next meeting.

AOCB

It was hoped that a meeting could be arranged for January in person.