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Aviation Policy Framework
Department for Transport
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Dear Administrator

Developing a sustainable framework for UK aviation: Scoping Document

The Dounreay Stakeholder Group (DSG) is an independent body whose role is to provide public scrutiny of the Dounreay site, by providing an active, two-way channel of communication between the site operators, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) and local stakeholders. Within its remit the DSG takes a keen interest in socio economics and infrastructure projects.

The DSG welcomes the opportunity to respond to your scoping document on a sustainable framework for UK aviation.

Responses to the questions in the scoping document are set out below:

5.1 How does the aviation sector as a whole benefit the UK?

DSG believes that this sector is vital for rural communities to allow businesses to develop and more importantly grow. Caithness must continue to be easily connected to the rest of the UK (with links from Aberdeen/Edinburgh to London/Manchester maintained) to allow local business the same advantage as others. For that reason and at a time when the area is working to secure the economic diversification of our area from nuclear into renewables it is vital that Wick airport continues to operate to allow connectivity to Aberdeen/Edinburgh and onwards.

5.2 What do you consider to be the aviation sector's most important contributions to economic growth and social well-being?

Affordable prices with good connectivity. Flight connections should allow local companies to conduct its business throughout the UK thereby enabling people or goods to be moved effectively and within a reasonable timescale.

To ensure Wick airport is a viable airport the Scottish Government must consider business travel as well as social inclusion in the qualifying criteria for the Air Discount Scheme at least for a period of time when regeneration of Caithness and North Sutherland is essential.

5.9 How important are air transport connections – both international and domestic – to the UK at both national and regional levels?

Vitally important for areas such as ours. To allow the UK and more importantly our local supply chain to compete in all sectors of world industry then good quality, well connected air transport is essential. Linking air transport with connectivity to railways, ports and roads is also essential for ensuring good connectivity throughout the UK.

For business in general and business growth opportunities there will always be a dependency on air travel and therefore investment in its development, growth and connectivity is important for the Scottish and UK economy.

From a regional point of view, living in rural communities air connectivity for many reasons, business and social is vital. To be able to fly from Wick, arrive in London, hold a meeting and be home in the evening is an important aspect of business life and this can be done at present. However, if the services are diminished and traveling time increases greatly (road and rail are far too slow to conduct meaningful cost-effective business meetings) it would greatly reduce the ability for local companies to compete in the UK market.

It is essential, at the very least, to continue with the services already provided at Wick Airport and, at best, to enhance the service wherever possible to allow connectivity to Aberdeen/Edinburgh and onwards to London/Manchester.

5.10 As long as people and goods can easily reach their desired destination from the UK, does it matter if they use a foreign rather than a UK hub to the airport?

From a local point of view, it is important that the Aberdeen/Edinburgh/London hubs are retained. Connectivity to Highland Airports would suffer should these stop providing the services and connectivity it currently has. It would have a very negative impact on the connectivity of Caithness to the rest of the UK and beyond.

5.16 Would it be possible to establish a new ‘virtual’ hub airport in the UK with better connectivity between London and/or major regional airports? Could another airport take on a limited hub role? What would be the benefit and other impacts?

It appears impracticable to establish a new ‘virtual’ hub and further information and consideration would need to be made before making a decision on this. As stated above the hubs in London/Manchester are essential for the far north of Scotland businesses to compete on a level playing field with the rest of the UK.

5.18 What can be done – and by whom – to encourage a switch from domestic air travel to rail?

This is only advantageous in some areas of the UK but will not help in any way throughout the Highlands of Scotland. The difference between traveling from Wick to Aberdeen (as an example) is 20 minutes by air and opposed to 6 hours by road and approx 6 hours by train (dependent on catching connections at the right time). High speed rail is not being considered for Scotland and therefore domestic air travel remains a necessity for the Highlands.

5.20 How can regional airports and the aviation sector as a whole support the rebalancing of the economy across the UK?

In the North of Scotland a great deal of attention is being focused on offshore and marine renewables. As renewables become more significant in our area the flight connectivity to and from airports (Wick and the islands) need to improve to reflect the increasing requirements for business passenger traffic.

5.21 To what extent do UK airports meet the needs of their customers? How might these needs be more effectively met within existing capacity? What is the right balance between competition and regulation?

Wick airport continues to meet passenger needs but looking into the future additional flights and increased point to point services would greatly benefit local businesses in the far north and the islands. Larger airports do not appear to focus on regional connectivity and therefore this potentially impacts negatively on smaller regional airports

5.22 Can we extract more capacity out of the UK's existing airport infrastructure? Can we do this in a way which is environmentally acceptable? To what extent might demand management measures help achieve this?

If the implementation of the proposed high speed rail link in areas of England goes ahead there is likely to be an increased capacity for London airports. This could allow the re-alignment and potential introduction of new flights and/or timetables and if this is the case timetables should be fully scrutinized to ensure maximum benefit to smaller airport connectivity.

5.39 What scope is there to influence people and industry to make choices aimed at reducing aviation's climate change impacts, e.g. modal shift, alternatives to travel, better information for passengers, fuller planes, airspace management?

Competitive pricing for local residents would encourage further use. For the Caithness and other similar rural areas competitive pricing and a reduced flat rate cost on 'low use' flights would be beneficial to ensure that flights are fully utilized instead of under-subscribed passenger flights were taken.

5.40 What do you consider to be the most significant impacts – positive and negative – of aviation for local communities? Can more be done to enhance or mitigate those impacts? If so, what and by whom?

Living in a rural area the airport is an extremely important lifeline for residents and businesses alike. The facility is significant for the economic challenges being faced during the rundown of the Dounreay nuclear site, especially for the local supply chain that need to diversify away from its dependency on the nuclear industry and move into other areas, such as renewables.

5.41 Do you think that current arrangements for local engagement on aviation issues, e.g. through airport consultative committees and the development of airport master plans are effective?

Wick Airport Consultative Committee (WACC) has a range of relevant stakeholders and is able to effectively communicate needs. It is essential that the decision makers listen to local area needs and the Dounreay Stakeholder Group would like to see open dialogue with the WACC, the Caithness Chamber of Commerce and the Caithness Transport Forum to ensure that our needs are fully met both for residents and businesses.

Yours sincerely

Bob Earnshaw
DSG Chairman

cc. DSG members
John Thurso, MP
Rob Gibson, MSP