

GACC NEWSLETTER

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Dear Members

Airport developments

The last two months have been the most extraordinary in Gatwick's history.

When we wrote to you in March the airport had already taken steps to reduce its operational footprint and costs. It had closed the airport to flights between midnight and 05.30, deferred most capital expenditure and made a number of redundancies. It had also called on the government to step in to support UK airports.

Since then it has consolidated its operations into the South Terminal and reduced operational hours for scheduled flights to between 1400 and 2200. In practice very few flights are currently using Gatwick. Other major UK airports have taken similar steps.

GACC continues to recognise the challenges the airport faces in these unprecedented circumstances and to sympathise with its employees and others whose jobs are affected.

Inevitably the airport's future is uncertain. Some of its major customers, including BA and Virgin, have said that they may leave Gatwick. Others have been clear that it will take a long time for traffic to return to pre-pandemic levels. Gatwick itself believes that post-COVID-19 passenger numbers might return to recent levels within three to four years. But some independent commentators believe the impact of the pandemic on aviation demand will last much longer, or may indeed be permanent.

Gatwick's expansion plans

Gatwick has, however, said that it intends to continue with its expansion plans, and public consultation on the emergency runway development is now scheduled for 2021. Given the material fall in demand for the airport's services, and the climate change, noise and other consequences, GACC does not believe that there is a credible case for any expansion at Gatwick. We are also concerned that a planning process would absorb Council and other resources that should be focused on supporting communities and businesses impacted by the pandemic.

We have therefore written to the airport's CEO asking him to withdraw the planning application for the emergency runway development with immediate effect. Our letter is [here](#). We have also written to local councils urging them to take steps to agree new planning arrangements under which all future growth, including any growth deriving from more intensive use of the main runway, would be subject to rigorous planning scrutiny and consent, in line with government policy. That letter is [here](#)

CAA decision on emergency runway airspace change

Many of you will have seen the story in The Times on Wednesday 6 May "**Gatwick gets watchdog approval to add 50,000 flights on new runway**".

The CAA decided that Gatwick's emergency runway airspace change proposal did not require public consultation because, amongst other things, "*The environmental impact relating to this proposal is assessed as nil.*"

At first glance this is very worrying. But in fact the CAA's decision was a narrow and technical one and is not particularly significant.

The change proposal the CAA was responding to was simply whether a document called the Aeronautical Information Publication (AIP) should be amended if and when Gatwick's emergency runway is redeveloped. At the moment the AIP says that the emergency runway can only be used when the main runway is non-operational and that it cannot be used simultaneously with the main runway. If the emergency runway project goes ahead both those facts would be wrong and the AIP would have to be changed. The CAA decided that the amendment to the AIP in itself did not require consultation and would not have environmental impacts.

The CAA was clear that it was not consenting to the emergency runway redevelopment or to any increase the number of flights permitted (which under current law are matters for the planning process) but solely whether the AIP should be amended if the development received planning consent and was implemented. In this context we don't think its decision is surprising. It does not make development of the emergency runway any more likely.

But it conceals a range of important wider issues, such as why the country's airspace regulator appears to have no role to play in the expansion of a major airport and the possibility of 50,000 extra flights each year with huge environmental and noise consequences. We will continue to make the case for proper regulation of aviation's noise and environmental impacts.

National aviation policy

In that context GACC joined other national airport community groups in signing a letter to the Secretary of State asking him to commission a far-reaching review of the aviation industry, and the regulatory mechanisms through which it is overseen, in the light of the series of failures that have impacted the industry over the last year, culminating in the COVID-19 pandemic.

The joint letter argues that these events have had very significant environmental, health and financial costs that collectively amount to a systemic failure of the industry, its regulators and policy makers. We said that this must be addressed in forthcoming aviation policy in a way that the 2018 Green Paper failed to do. We also asked that the intention to carry out a review should be a condition of any "bail out" of UK aviation businesses resulting from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The letter is available [here](#).

Monitoring the changing situation

From the huge amount of press coverage, you will be aware that COVID-19 and the government's various mitigation strategies have resulted in a rapidly changing landscape for both airlines and airports. The GACC Committee is tracking these developments as they happen and monitoring their potential effect on the airport and on communities adversely impacted by Gatwick's operations. We will continue to monitor the situation closely and will update you in future newsletters.

Keep safe and stay well.