



GLOUCESTERSHIRE AIRPORT RUNWAY SAFETY PROJECT (RSP)

Presentation of the opinion of the Federation of Small Businesses, Gloucester Branch, to Gloucester City Council, Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, Airport Scrutiny Task and Finish Group, by Mr Geoffrey Day, Vice Chair of the Branch.

Opinion

It is the view of the Branch that Gloucestershire Airport makes an important contribution to the macro business environment of the county, and of Gloucester and surrounding area; and that the proposed Runway Safety Project including Instrument Landing System should be supported, indeed positively encouraged.

Why?

1. We believe the airport has already established an important role in the county and a not insignificant contribution directly to the GVA of the county.
2. There are significant jobs at the airport, both in respect of Aviation related activities (300 +), and non Aviation related activities (3500 +).
3. Airport access is first class from North, South, East and West. Access traffic does not cause any travel blockages to commuters/transport elsewhere.
4. The airport has established itself as an important centre for:
 - 4.1. Maintenance and repairs with aircraft coming in from many parts of the UK.
 - 4.2. Emergency Services and Support ie, Police, and Air Ambulance.
 - 4.3. Business executive jets.
 - 4.4. Pilot training.
5. Both Aviation related and non Aviation related employment at the airport and surrounding area has steadily increased, and should continue to do so given that the Airport is able to execute its Business Plan.
6. The indirect support to businesses is difficult to measure but the county suffers from some key transport infrastructure deficiencies namely the A417/A419 problem at Birdlip Hill, and the absence of dual tracking track on part of the Gloucester to Swindon rail link.

We, therefore, need to preserve, indeed enhance our airport facilities and linkage for the many senior business executives who need to travel nationally or internationally.

The European Business Aviation Association report that businessmen questioned on the benefits of business Aviation referred to flexibility, convenience, time and cost savings, ability to do deals and a reduced threat of terrorism.

7. The presence of the airport must enhance our ability in all areas of the county to attract inward investment and thus bring jobs to the area. That added communication will be important in such decisions, and it is considered that the airport has a vital business role in strategic facilities now and in the future.
8. In an increasingly important Europe we believe that the importance of the region is enhanced by having a business airport.
9. Looking to future Aviation developments CO2 emissions can be expected to fall, indeed this is already happening. The new "Very Light Jets" (VLJ) such as Cessna Citation Mustang; Phenom 100, Honda Jet offer planes that are a fraction of the weight of conventional jets, more fuel and CO2 efficient. It would be invidious indeed if negative decisions on the airports future were taken on the basis of old technology by those understandably concerned about CO2 and the environment, when we are on the cusp of fundamental aeronautical change that offers airports like Gloucestershire an even more relevant future.
10. The execution of the business plan does offer improved facilities for the public. Present services to the Channel Islands and Isle of Man can also service Dublin, Edinburgh, London City Airport and maybe Paris making important holiday (and business) locations accessible.

The airport does not have designs on rivalling Bristol, Exeter, Birmingham but it is undeniable that the above service extensions would offer county residents an important transport option, with access again being excellent.

11. It does the county no harm to have an operational airport that can play a role in case of emergencies such as the 2007 flooding.
12. Whilst most tourists visit the county by road, we should not underestimate the importance of the airport for specialist event tourists eg:
 - 12.1. Cheltenham Races.
 - 12.2. Specialist festivals.
 - 12.3. Royal events.
13. People need jobs, it is all too easy to look at an area of land and for the owner to seek to maximize value which, until very recent times, has meant selling as Residential encouraged by the high density development allowed/encouraged by Government. If all did this we would have all houses and no jobs. Employment land is vital. We must not destroy jobs. The county benefits from a diverse employment spread yet is still forecast to suffer badly in the current downturn.

Were airport land developed on masse as residential we should have an urban sprawl connecting Gloucester and Cheltenham, pumping out massive CO2, and completely despoiling the environmental ambience of having two urban areas (City; Town) with different histories and character that actually give the county much of its character, and appeal to tourists and incoming business people. We destroy that at our peril. Lose that and we will never get it back.

14. Land owners who are Councils have wide responsibilities. They must not look merely at highest price but must consider economic value and use of land, in the context of their responsibilities to ensure that communities are balanced in every way, viz residences, employment, communication, community facilities, safety, environment, countryside etc etc. This dictates that land has a community value and should be subject to Cost Benefit Analysis within the context above. We suggest this supports the development of the airport as it ticks so many boxes, as indicated above.
15. Get this decision wrong, and it would be difficult to correct later. The airport needs to move forward, and if land were expropriated for other purposes how do you get the airport back to its previous operational capability.
16. In retaining our airport we should seek to operate it to the highest possible applicable safety standards as set out in the business plan.
17. The question of land owned by Gloucester Council should be capable of being resolved by an agreement whereby the land is given a community value in excess of green belt values, and becomes a “first charge” amount to be paid to the Council if there is future development, or change of company ownership, even if the payment is over a prescribed period of time.

Concluding we believe those involved with decisions on the airport, but who carry responsibilities to all interests in the county, whether as a whole, or with particular regard to an individual area, should look beyond the immediate, although this argues for the airport anyway, to the future of the county, its people, its business; look to, in this case future developments in Aviation; and be inspirational as well as realistic in backing the RSP and Business Plan.

Geoffrey Day, Vice chairman
FSB Gloucester Branch
2nd December 2008

Note. The Federation of Small Businesses has 3380 member firms and companies in North Gloucestershire, with the Gloucester Branch having some 650/700 members. Member firms range from very small businesses up to multi director companies employing 50/100 people, and operate across a broad spectrum of business types. South Gloucestershire has 1090 members.