House of Commons
Transport Committee


Third Special Report of Session 2014–15

Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed date 1 September 2014
The Transport Committee

The Transport Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Transport and its Associate Public Bodies.

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Publication

The Reports of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the internet at http://www.parliament.uk/transcom. A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the back of this volume.

The Reports of the Committee and the formal minutes relating to that report are available in a printed volume. Written evidence is published on the internet only.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Gordon Clarke (Clerk), Nick Beech (Second Clerk), Alexandra Meakin (Committee Specialist), Adrian Hitchins (Senior Committee Assistant), Stewart McIlvenna (Committee Assistant), and Hannah Pearce (Media Officer)

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Transport Committee, House of Commons, 14 Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NB, The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6263; the Committee’s email address is transcom@parliament.uk
Third Special Report

On 6 August 2014 we received a response from the Airport Operators Association to the Transport Committee’s Fourteenth Report of 2013–14, *Putting passengers first: disruption at Gatwick, Christmas Eve 2013*¹ which we publish with this Special Report.

**Airport Operators Association response**

**Introduction**

Founded in 1934, the Airport Operators Association (AOA) is the national voice of UK airports. We are a trade association representing the interests of UK airports, and the principal such body engaging with the UK Government and regulatory authorities on airport matters. The AOA’s members include over 50 airports and 150 Associate Members, made up of companies representing a wide range of suppliers in the aviation industry.

On 31 March the Transport Select Committee published its report *Putting passengers first: disruption at Gatwick, Christmas Eve 2013*. The report considered the causes of disruption at Gatwick towards the end of 2013 and the response from the airport and airlines. Some of the recommendations made in the report are specific to regulated airports, Heathrow and Gatwick, but there are a number which apply to AOA member airports right across the UK. In this paper, the AOA considers those recommendations which are relevant to all airports.

**Contingency Planning**

Operational contingency planning and protocols to help assess potential disruption are discussed throughout the report, with recommendations that the CAA guide such planning at airports.

The report states:

- The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) is now responsible for overseeing operational resilience issues at both Heathrow and Gatwick. We recommend that the CAA ensure that the airports’ contingency plans have been developed with the airlines and other relevant parties, that the plans are properly tested and widely disseminated (p11).

- We also agree with Mr McMillan’s recommendation⁴ that “Gatwick should work with airlines to develop much clearer operational protocols to develop guidance on

¹ HC 956, published 11 April 2014.

² David McMillan, is a non executive director on Gatwick’s Board, and is also Chair of the Board of Governors of the Flight Safety Foundation. He was Director General of Eurocontrol, which co-ordinates air traffic across 40 European states, from 2008 to 2012; and before that he was UK Director General of Civil Aviation and spoke for Europe on environmental issues at ICAO.

Gatwick commissioned a review of the problems which occurred on 24 December 2013 from David McMillan, which was presented to the Board of Gatwick Airport in February 2014.

threshold conditions that would trigger the cancellation or postponement of flights”. CAA should consider how this recommendation might be extended to cover other airports (p16).

Operational resilience is important at all airports; whether they are regulated or not, they are busy during peak hours and severe weather and other problems could occur anywhere. The AOA agrees that all airports should demonstrate good practice and develop and disseminate contingency plans with airlines and other relevant parties, but we do not agree that regulatory oversight is necessary to achieve this. We will continue to encourage, through the AOA Operations & Safety Group, good practice amongst airports in developing plans to manage the cancellation of flights and operational contingency plans in the face of disruption.

Information Provision

The Committee makes specific recommendations about providing passenger information. On ‘Passenger Champions’, the report states:

- We endorse the recommendation of the McMillan report that Gatwick should appoint Passenger Champions for each of its terminals, who will focus on ensuring that passengers’ needs are prioritised. We recommend that CAA encourage other airports to take similar steps (p13).

Other points in the report relate to information provision, for example the suggestion that airlines should text and email passengers about delays, and the recommendation that the CAA bring forward their proposals for improving the provision of information to passengers (p14-15). It is possible that these recommendations may also impact the way in which airports deliver information.

The AOA agrees that Passenger Champions may be appropriate at some airports, but believes the CAA should focus on the effective provision of information rather than specifying a single means of providing information. Different airports will use different infrastructure and resources for delivering information during disruption; as with other recommendations from the Committee, one size fits all solutions should be avoided in a diverse sector with businesses of different sizes. Some examples of the structures airports already have in place to respond to disruption include:

- At Bristol Airport back office staff will take on duties such as switchboard cover to enable frontline customer services team to focus on assisting with tasks such as repatriation of bags (in the case of cancelled flights), organising onward transport and face-to-face communications in the terminal. In severe weather disruption the airport takes the lead in arranging transport for key staff from pre-agreed pick up points, e.g. using 4x4 vehicles in heavy snow.

- At Manchester Airport, customer welfare teams are trained to be the first respondents if there is ever disruption; other office-based staff can also provide help on the ground, as needed on a case by case basis.

- At London Luton Airport, a Crisis Management Plan is in place to collect situational information and connect it to strategic directives from senior management to adopt the
most appropriate strategic direction before the plan is deployed into tactical action. To develop this plan the airport is also in the early development stages of more detailed Supplementary Crisis Management Plan (SCMP) to further address the passenger experience. The SCMP will address all envisaged single points of failure and deliver a set of appropriate actions for each scenario giving due consideration to the passenger experience, corporate governance, regulator satisfaction, business reputation, time and cost versus benefit. Therefore, it is envisaged that the plan will evaluate every conceived scenario and based on situational circumstance, the airport’s Crisis Management Team will adopt the most appropriate set of actions for any given circumstance. All plans will be agreed with stakeholders including resident airlines, regulators and service providers so to ensure the approach is consistent across the airport community.

The AOA and our members have a joint working group set up with the CAA to discuss the provision of information to passengers. This group will review how airports provide information for passengers during disruption and also review proposed operational resilience best practice guidelines being produced by the CAA.

**Passenger Welfare**

The AOA welcomes the acknowledgement that staff on the ground during the disruption at Gatwick worked extremely hard (p8).

The report suggests airports can go further in their work with passengers:

- Under EU law, airlines must provide care and assistance to passengers during delays: this can vary from food and drink to a hotel room... In our view, there is a crucial role for airports during cases of severe disruption, when airline staff are likely to be overstretched, to provide welfare services that would normally be the responsibility of the airlines... It would be crucial for airlines and airports to reach operational agreements about when airports should step in and how costs should be allocated. We recommend that the Government review this issue (p14)

The provision of welfare and the costs associated with it are best agreed between airports and airlines without Government intervention. The relationship between the airline and passenger is key and is primarily the responsibility of the airline. An airport will do its best to support passengers but should not be providing financial assistance that may result in confusion between airlines and passengers, and may not be in line with the policies and procedures airlines have in place to determine the types and costs of provisions they are able to make. The charges airports agree with airlines are already under pressure, with recent additional charges set by the CAA, and the financial agreements between businesses need to work for them and their customers. Public bodies would not be well placed to determine these financial arrangements. Most airports already take their responsibilities to customers very seriously and provide services to the best of their ability; we urge airports to continue to do so and to consider opportunities for providing welfare arrangements for passengers during severe disruption.
The AOA Snow Planning Survey 2012

In 2012, in response to a CAA request the AOA conducted a survey of its airport members on planning for winter disruption. This survey drew together good practice in the airport sector, and was also signed by BATA, the British Air Transport Association, demonstrating unity amongst UK airports and airlines on preparing for snow. A summary of the findings is appended to this report\(^3\) – the AOA will be re-visiting and updating the survey later this year in time for the 2014/2015 winter season, and we will ensure the Committee has sight of this newer version, once completed.

- AOA Snow Planning Survey 2012 – Summary of findings

Next steps

The AOA will continue to work with the CAA on information provision at airports and would be happy to discussion disruption further with the Transport Select Committee.

\(^3\) Summary of Snow Survey 2012 findings not published. See link above