

Policy Supports for Regional Airports- Submission by Dan Ahern M.P.S.I

Question 1: What category of stakeholder do you represent?

I own and run Aherns Pharmacy based in Farranfore Co.Kerry, which also incorporates [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] I am the 4th generation of my family to grow up and work in Farranfore. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Question 2: Having regard to the actions on regional airports in the National Aviation Policy, what are your views on the effectiveness of the current Regional Airports Programme?

I believe that the Public Services Obligation (PSO) support to the Kerry – Dublin route, is very cost effective enabling the Department meets the key actions of the National Aviation Policy;

- **Enhance Ireland’s connectivity by ensuring safe, secure and competitive access responsive to the needs of business, tourism and consumers;**

The PSO is essential for the Kerry region’s connectivity both nationally and internationally through the accessibility to the extensive route network of Dublin Airport. I have personally availed of the excellent service from my days studying in University of Sunderland in the mid 1990’s right up to the present day be it to attend business and professional meeting and events as well as leisure activities such as travelling to sporting events in Dublin, the U.K. and continental Europe.

It is a vital artery to the Kerry region, enabling local business to access national and international markets and clients in a time and cost efficient manner in contrast to the current options available from road and rail.

The integration with the wider air route network to and from Dublin airport is of major socio-economic benefit to the region enabling Irish and international visitors to visit Kerry and enabling the local population to access and visit Dublin and further afield.

- **Foster the growth of aviation enterprise in Ireland to support job creation and position Ireland as a recognised global leader in aviation**

The presence of the PSO supported Kerry Dublin route provided Kerry Airport with a guaranteed minimum level of commercial aviation activity, which I feel is an important asset for Kerry airport to attract other commercial routes and other aviation business.

We have seen the detrimental impact to other regional airports e.g. Galway when the PSO route has been removed from a regional airport.

The experience and record of successfully managing a commercial route network anchored by the Kerry Dublin PSO route has helped Kerry airport successfully develop other aviation business e.g. support services and parking of private aircraft, construction and maintenance of jet and helicopter hangars and most recently in 2019 a helicopter and support base for crews manning exploration wells in the Porcupine Basin.

I would argue, considering Irelands population size and dispersal, that a Spoke and wheel model for our airport network would best meet the needs of the State, whereby the main large State airport is linked in with the smaller regional airports such as Kerry, to create an integrated national and international aviation route network.

- **Maximise the contribution of the aviation sector to Ireland's economic growth and development**

The points made earlier in terms of access, connectivity and aviation services expertise which are all supported by the presence of the PSO supported Kerry Dublin route assist the country's economic growth and development, especially in the peripheral regions of the Western seaboard like Kerry.

Direct contribution is made by the economic activity of Kerry airport itself, the wages of Kerry airport employees being spent in the local economy in businesses such as my own, the spend of visitors to the region.

The accessibility of Kerry to Dublin via the PSO route helps make Kerry a more attractive destination for business, as well as enabling Kerry business access new clients and markets.

Question 3: What, if any, changes would you like to see reflected in the new Programme and why?

An increase in the frequency of flights on the service to three a day. The current schedule of two a day, while welcome, has often meant that I have been able to fly up to Dublin for a morning meeting, however in terms of returning to Kerry I am left with either having to get a train down or wait for the late flight, thus losing half a day. This is an issue of frustration to many business people in Kerry.

Question 4: How do you think the new Programme can best support Ireland's transition to a low carbon economy, having regard to policy on climate action and sustainability?

A route such as Kerry Dublin operating at a high capacity feeding into the international aviation network operating out of Dublin airport would in my opinion be a much more environmentally sustainable aviation model rather than a multiple of airport sites in the State operating competing routes with lower load factors to the same destinations

Question 5: What are your views on the PSO Scheme, the air service routes currently being supported and the need for a continuation of the Scheme beyond 2022?

Personally I am a major advocate of the PSO scheme, as outlined in the comments above. The two current routes serve the most peripheral regions in the country and the PSO routes are vital for the connectivity and socio-economic future of the regions served.

The Departments own figures show that the routes are well supported with year on year growth in passenger numbers.

Considering the state supports provided to other transport systems, I believe the PSO routes deliver excellent value for money.

The routes need to be supported in the medium and long term in view of the lack of major road infrastructure planned and potential reduction in public rail and bus services to the regions.

Additional Comments

Please feel free to add additional comments as part of your submission.

Note: The limit for all submissions is 2,000 words and the deadline for receipt of submissions is cob on 30 September 2019.