



30 September 2019

The following is a submission from Donegal County Council in response to the public consultation and request for submissions to inform the Regional Airports Programme 2020 – 2024.

Donegal County Council is the statutory development authority with multi faceted responsibilities in establishing and maintaining critical infrastructure in the County, regulatory responsibility for strategic and developmental planning and acts as the primary animator in identifying and responding to investment needs in key economic sectors and where market weakness might be presenting.

The National Aviation Policy (NAP) recognizing “the role of smaller airports in supporting regional development and commits to encouraging airports to attract new business, to achieve excellence in the delivery of service and value for passengers and airlines, and to make a sustainable contribution to their respective local economies and communities” is very much in line with the Council’s own efforts in that regard and Donegal County Council is of the view that this overarching policy must be continued.

Donegal Airport provides a direct link with Dublin and Glasgow, with the Dublin service being provided through Aer Lingus regional, operated by Stobart Air while Loganair is the current service provider on the Glasgow route. Dublin has two flights daily between the capital and the County. Over the past three years the passenger numbers have been increasing steadily. It is a critical entry point into Donegal for both business and leisure users and has been widely cited by businesses, particularly in the west Donegal area, as offering a critical transport access.

Unlike many other areas of the Country, there has not been the recent, substantial investment in the road infrastructure to Donegal, as such the National road network is weaker in this part of the island. Similarly, there is no train service to any part of the County, further reducing travel options for the County.

The tourism sector is a critically important sector in the County, employing some 8,000 people, is continuing to grow on the back of the success of the marketing brand of the Wild Atlantic Way and has activated substantial private sector investment in key tourism infrastructure, such as hotels, restaurants and associated businesses.

The Council, in conjunction with the sector and service providers such as Donegal Airport, continue to resource and fund activities in marketing the County and in using the Airport to facilitate ease of access to the County.

The current programme of PSO support to Donegal Airport and the associated supports for capital investment have been critical in the airport developing to meet required safety standards and customer expectation.

The PSO value to the area across economic and social grounds is substantial and must be continued at its current levels.

Capital grants are critical to ensure the implementation of essential Safety & Security projects to maintain full compliance with regulatory standards and procedures and continue to obtain EASA Certification annually. Operational grants are essential to assist in off-setting core airport costs, again to meet regulatory standards and procedures, which is challenging for smaller airports with low revenue base compared to the airports with higher capacity and ability to obtain a higher revenue base.

The suggestion that future capital investment will require a model which will see 50% provided by the private sector and/or the local authority is of concern. Firstly, the private sector may not be attracted to such investment, given the rate of return on investment and its associated timeline. Secondly, while the Local Authority is fully supportive of development in this area, a step up for substantial capital investment would prove challenging given existing core statutory and other development funding requirements.

It is the view of Donegal County Council that continued support, both Capital and towards the PSO, is critical and warranted and strongly recommend its continuation during the new programme period.

Yours Sincerely,

