

Regional Airports Programme Submission 2020-2024

1: What category of stakeholder do you represent?

Galway City Council is the Local Authority for the Galway City area. Galway City is located in the West of Ireland, on the shores of Galway Bay and within sight of the Atlantic Ocean. In Global terms Galway is a peripheral location.

Galway is a growing city. The population of the city has grown from 47,000 in 1986 to currently stand at 79,934 and the city has previously had the title of the fastest growing city in Europe. This growth reflects the attractiveness of Galway as a city in which to study, to work, to visit and to live. There are a further 62,238 people (*Galway City LCEP 2015 - 2020*) who live within 30 minutes' drive of the city centre.

There are over 40,000 pupils and students in primary, secondary, further and third-level schools and colleges across Galway.

As the largest urban centre in the West, Galway City is a key driver of economic development in the region and makes a significant contribution to GDP growth. Galway is home to nine of the top ten medtech companies in the world and has a strong, emerging ICT cluster. The city thrives on innovation, entrepreneurship and diversity of culture. In 2014, Galway city was named the Best Overall MicroCity in Europe by fDi magazine, in recognition of its economic potential and business friendliness.

Galway city has long been considered a centre of cultural excellence and its reputation in Ireland and overseas has been enhanced by the presence of world leaders in the arts, like Druid Theatre Company and Galway International Arts Festival. The economic importance of the creative sector is further strengthened by the city's designation as a UNESCO City of Film one of only five cities worldwide. Galway City's successful bid to become the European Capital of Culture 2020 shows a commitment to the arts and culture from all agencies in the city.

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?

The objectives of the Programme are found to be largely consistent with Government priorities in respect of regional development.

The importance of regional airports in facilitating international connections is reflected in Project Ireland 2040, which consists of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the National Development Plan (NDP), as well as related Regional Economic and Spatial Strategies. The Government's commitment to regional airports is evident in the capital provision of €72 million for the Regional Airports Programme under the NDP from 2018 to 2027.

The provision of regional air services would be extremely challenging without Government intervention.

IWAK along with Donegal and Kerry Airports provide connectivity to Ireland’s most isolated region along with access points to the “Wild Atlantic Way” and “Atlantic Economic Corridor”.

IWAK lies on the primary route between Galway and Sligo. It also serves as the most accessible airport for a large part of the North West of Ireland. In its absence, a large region of Ireland would lack direct access to international flights. It is the only airport in the NWRA region catering for international flights.

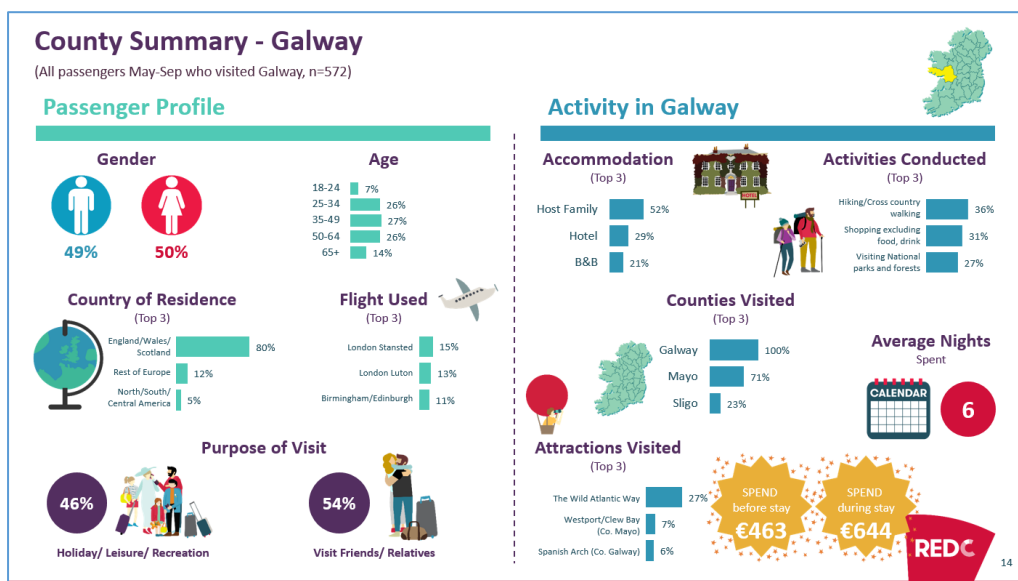
The Government’s recognition of the IWAK as one of the four main airports in the country and its position as a critical driver of economic and tourism development for the West and North West of Ireland was to be welcomed. In addition to this the Airport’s designation as a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ) in 2017 has been highlighted as critical to the long-term development of the Airport and the regional economy in the National Development Plan.

Donegal, Kerry and IWAK have all seen significant passenger growth in recent years, in line with the recovery of the wider economy. This growth will create increased safety and security requirements and improved Government finances have enabled subvention per passenger for operating costs to increase for the airports in recent years.

Improved data on passengers using the regional airports would be beneficial. More data on origin, destination and journey purpose would be valuable in evaluating the impact of the airports and help Galway City and the region utilise information in future planning and strategy development. The next Regional Airports Programme should include a higher level of surveying/ data capture/passenger profiling.

Tourism is an important factor in the use of both Kerry Airport and IWAK. This is a critical employment generating sector in Galway City and the NWRA region.

Providing affordable access between this region and the rest of the world, particularly our trading partners is essential in order to sustain the economic competitiveness of the region. The existing investment by the state in IWAK has been critical to providing and maintaining this economic infrastructure that underpins the growth and development in key sectors such as FDI and Tourism which are key economic drivers in this region.



Source – REDC (IWAC) Ireland West Airport Passenger Tracking Survey – Galway Summary

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

Galway City Council would view the further expansion of flight routes provided and the frequency as key Galway City/regional growth drivers and acknowledge the importance of continued RAP support for IWAK and other regional airports along the Atlantic Corridor.

Ireland West Airport Knock along with the other regional and national Airports play a vital part in Galway City's growth plans. IWAK currently has the most expansive range of destinations available of the regional airports. The UK and Spain account for most of the routes available to and from the airport with nine and seven destinations respectively. There are an additional eight European route destinations.

In 2018, 771,619 passengers passed through the airport and numbers have grown over the past 6 years by 12%. This represents an increase over 90,000 passengers. A Red Sea survey reported that 38% of air travellers passing through Knock Airport visit Galway City with an average spend of €696 per night. The significance of this to the tourist economy in Galway and the wider region cannot be underestimated.

IWAK also offers additional exposure to UK and European markets for businesses in Galway City. The airport is approximately one hour from Galway City travelling via the newly extended M17 & M18 and offers excellent link for Galway companies to the UK and Europe.

Galway City Council would concur with Passenger survey data that highlights IWAK is an important gateway into and out of Galway City and the Border, Midlands and Western (BMW) region.

Foreign tourists also cite that the airport's location and its proximity to major attractions such as the Wild Atlantic Way is an important consideration when deciding to fly to Ireland.

Data suggests that IWAK can become commercially sustainable over time, given its passenger numbers of just under 750,000 in 2018 but will require further RAP investment to maintain the required standards.

Galway City Council would view the further expansion of flight routes provided and the frequency as key city and regional growth drivers.

There is a requirement for ongoing investment to enhance the attractiveness of IWAK for airline passenger carriers, to maintain airport standards and continue to meet Aviation Regulations.

New customs and travel conditions which may result from Brexit is likely to require further upgrades to the infrastructure at IWAK based on the recent RED C survey which showed that 80% of passenger traffic was from the UK. This will need to be addressed in the new programme.

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?

The National Aviation Policy for Ireland outlines a commitment to working with international industry partners to reduce the impacts of aviation on the environment while facilitating sustainable growth within the sector.

In April 2019, the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport published '*Ireland's Action Plan for Aviation Emissions Reduction*'.

Strict energy compliance targets are in place for 2020 and 2030. A strong focus on investment in energy efficient technologies will help to reduce Regional Airport's operational costs while delivering the emissions reduction benefits.

Incentivising the procurement of lower emissions vehicles and equipment in the new Regional Airports Programme could deliver projects that will build resilience against the likely impacts of climate change.

Exploring the potential for uptake of low carbon and renewable energy alternatives. – Regional airports in Ireland are well placed to take advantage of new and emerging technologies in the field of airport management and environmental best practices. Funding should be assigned to encourage this.

The development of direct routes from international locations to IWAK could reduce congestion currently existing at Dublin airport and the carbon footprint created at Dublin airport by both airline traffic and vehicular traffic to and from the airport.

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?

“The principle underlying the EU guidelines is that State aid can be highly distortive to competition and market outcomes, and that “only State aid which is proportional and necessary to contribute to an objective of common interest can be acceptable”. Aid will be considered to contribute to the achievement of an objective of common interest if it: increased the mobility of Union citizens and the connectivity of the regions by establishing access points for intra-Union flights; or combats air traffic congestion at major Union hub airports; or facilitates regional development. “(Spending Review 2019” A Review of the Regional Airports Programme p44, Government of Ireland)

The PSO scheme is a key action in pursuing regional development in the NWRA region, is in harmony with the EU guidelines as outlined above and therefore should be continued beyond 2022 and extended to include flights between Dublin and IWAK and IWAK the other regional and national airports along the western seaboard including Donegal, Shannon, Kerry and Cork in order to support the strategic objective in Ireland 2040 in regard to “Improved accessibility and connectivity to peripheral regions, focused on key routes to a number of larger and regionally distributed centres.” (Ireland 2040 p.36 Government of Ireland)

Additional Comments.

Regional Airports have a key infrastructural role along the West coast of Ireland and are specified as key driver for economic development, tourism and regional connectivity in both national and regional strategies.

Project 2040 -High-Quality International Connectivity

“As an island, continued investment in our port and airport connections to the UK, the EU and the rest of the world, is integral to underpinning international competitiveness. It is also central to responding to the challenges as well as the opportunities arising from Brexit.

Continued Exchequer support for smaller regional airports is planned under the Regional Airports Programme. Given its scale of operation, Ireland West Airport Knock plays a more regional role in terms of international access than the other smaller airports, given its location in the North-West. Knock is proposing two significant developments over the coming years, namely an overlay of the main runway and an apron safety extension. In addition, Knock Airport’s designation as a Strategic Development Zone will contribute to the long-term development of the airport and the regional economy.”

NWRA.

“The Northern and Western Regional Assembly is crafting a vision for our region that is vibrant, connected, natural, inclusive and smart. Simply we have three clear objectives. The NWRA is working to create BETTER PLACES by adopting best practice in international spatial and economic development. Achieving COMPETITIVENESS by optimising EU and exchequer funding and harnessing the strengths of our ‘place’, through COLLABORATION.

AEC

“The Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative provides an opportunity to create an accelerated, more responsive pathway for regional development in Ireland. Improved connectivity will be vital to unlock the economic and social potential of the Atlantic region. That includes physical improvements in road, rail and other transport infrastructure but also the digital connectivity that has the power to transform and energise rural areas.”

