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**Ms. Margaret Bell**  
**Airports Division**  
**Department of Transport,**  
**Tourism and Sport**  
**Leeson Lane**  
**Dublin 2**  
**D02 TR60**

**27 September, 2019**

**Dear Ms. Bell,**

I am writing in connection with your Department's consultation paper on policy supports for regional airports, particularly in the context of Sligo airport.

As you are aware, Sligo Airport has been the North West base for the Irish Coast Guard's Search and Rescue service (SAR) since 2004 and maintains full operational capability and licensing to international aerodrome standards. Since the withdrawal of its PSO funding in 2011, the airport has maintained its operations through careful management and prudent use of income.

However, in the absence of subvention, it has had to dip into its once considerable cash reserves. In order now to maintain its EASA certification, gained through the combined efforts of staff and management, there is a requirement for some capital works including in particular upgrading of the runway lighting. The costs of that work are modest, in particular having regard to:

- the ideal location of the airport for its search and rescue missions (I understand it is the busiest base in the Country);
- the 45 full-time staff employed at the airport (including SAR staff settled in Sligo);
- the safeguarding of the investment made over the years;
- the small aircraft maintenance business located there;
- the value of the airport in pursuing the Government objectives for Sligo under Project Ireland 2040;
- the potential to enhance services and find new income streams if funding for a period can be assured.

I am aware of, and strongly support, the request from the Sligo Airport Board and management in its response to the consultation for modest capital investment and an operational subvention over the next five years. A positive response has the potential not alone to put the airport on a sound financial footing but also to provide the breathing space necessary to develop new projects and income streams.

I view the airport as critically important to the continued economic development of Sligo. Of late, economic investment by Government of almost €250m has been announced for Sligo and much of it is underway. Around 1,600 new jobs have been announced over the past year by Enterprise Ireland and the IDA. The demise of the airport would be a very serious setback to the increasing determination, driven by key players including the Council, its executive, the Chamber of Commerce

and various other State agencies and private sector people to work together with one voice to drive Sligo forward.

Some high-profile people with strong expertise in the aviation sector have of late been approached and have agreed to assist the Board and management to drive the operation forward and target additional income-generating streams. It is my intention to provide whatever assistance I can to this effort including becoming a Director and I am to advise that the process has already been initiated in this regard.

*Yours Sincerely,*

