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Regional development agency raises concerns over airport expansion

The South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) has raised major concerns about the economic benefits weighed against the climate change implications of Bristol airport's expansion plans, a "hugely significant" position statement according to the Stop Bristol Airport Expansion group.

The campaigners said that SWRDA's reservations about the airport's planning application show that the RDA has taken on board the importance of the environmental impacts while acknowledging the weakness of the economic argument for expansion.

SBAE spokesman Jeremy Birch said:

"These are concerns we have always highlighted and which have been backed up by Bristol City and B&NES Councils. With SWRDA now acknowledging the same problems, North Somerset Council must sit up and listen when it takes its decision – that the climate change implications of this development are major and cannot be outweighed by weak economic arguments."

In its official response to the airport's planning application [1], the long term wider issues raised by the RDA were:

- "Concern about the robustness of passenger growth projections (recognising that this is part of a national issue);
- Doubts about the net economic benefits to UK plc, and the region, of airport expansion that is predicated on growth in outbound leisure flights, where we believe there is a need for further analysis to be undertaken; and
- The need to respond to the carbon implications of air travel, given the severity of the challenge posed by climate change."

SWRDA also quoted its own report from December 2007 [2] which said:

- "it [SWRDA] should not make any further investments in airports for the purpose of increasing passenger numbers;
- it should actively support measures that make airports greener and improve surface access, particularly by public transport; and
- it should work with all relevant parties to reduce emissions associated with air travel."

Jeremy Birch concluded:

"There is no such thing as a 'green' airport in any shape or form as more flights will increase carbon emissions. We won't see better public transport access for years, and technical improvements in planes will not compensate for more flights. Expansion of the airport is premature.

“Bristol airport says it wants an improved experience for its passengers, but really just wants more passengers and more flights. North Somerset Council must ensure it caps passenger numbers and is not lured into passing ‘improvements’ that actually allow a vast increase in passenger capacity.”

ENDS

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For more information visit: www.stopbia.com

Notes

[1] See comments from statutory consultees and other organisations at: <http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/Environment/planning/majorapplications/howtoviewcommentsbia.htm>

[2] SWRDA Final Report: Economic Assessment of South West Regional Airports, EKOS Consultancy, December 2007