

**AOA meeting to discuss borders, 27 April 2016, Westminster**

- Home Office, Border Force, DfT attendees: Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, Home Office, Minister of State (Security and Immigration); Alex Gledhill, Border Force, Chief of Staff, Director General's Office; and Ian Elston, DfT, Head of Airport Policy and Competition Branch, Aviation Policy Division
  - Airport representatives: Graeme Mason, Newcastle International Airport, Planning and Corporate Affairs Director; Paul Davies, Bristol Airport, Operations Director; Colin Swaine, Liverpool John Lennon Airport, Airport Operations Director; and Darren Caplan, AOA Chief Executive
1. JB opened the meeting by saying he had had bilateral discussions with a number of different airports. DC explained that whilst individual engagement was of course welcome – and three of the AOA's airports were at the present meeting – there was also a need for the sector's concerns as a whole to be addressed. For example, with passenger numbers increasing substantially in recent years and with this set to continue in future (the DfT's 2013 annual UK airport passenger forecasts for 2015, at the highest scenario, were already 17 million passengers lower than the actual 2015 figures of almost 252 million), Border Force's (BF) budget was not matching this increase; in fact, the overall budget figures just released for 2016/17 were 0.4% down on the previous year and had only just been released, giving little time to prepare for the summer. Furthermore, whilst BF says it is hitting 99% Service Level Agreements (SLAs), there are concerns not just about these not perhaps being ambitious enough but also whether service levels were delivering a good customer experience at the border, one of the key concerns of a number of AOA airports, such as MAG which had raised this as a priority in previous borders meetings. DC listed three 'asks':
    - Short-term reassurance that there would be adequate resourcing for airport borders this coming summer, given the decrease in budgets and the fact that airport passenger numbers are at their highest in the summer
    - A better explanation from Border Force of the longer-term 'transformation plan', to ensure that long-term challenges are planned for and that airports don't have to go through the yearly concern about resourcing; and better long-term planning per se, a priority ask for airports such as LHR in previous borders meetings
    - Better sectoral engagement – whilst JB and BF officials have bilateral meetings with airports, there was agreement on a number of issues amongst the airport sector nationally, yet JB had not as yet held a sectoral meeting or roundtable; and this is something the AOA and airports would welcome
  2. JB commented that the priority is security, but despite the fact that SLAs are being hit, service levels are important to BF too and they do care how long passengers queue. With regard to the 'transformation plan', with HM Treasury setting budgets and little chance of its budget levels being influenced, BF saw increased IT and reduced manning as the fundamental change for the future. IE thought that BF need to better understand passenger flows from airports and JB felt that more advanced communication on new routes would be a key requirement to improve planning ahead and enable to forecast where demand would be in future. DC enquired whether there was a known aviation budget from the Treasury available, and the response was there was not – there is a combined airports and ports budget which for flexibility reasons were not separated.

3. AG claimed that BF had already formulated plans to deliver the summer programmes within the agreed SLAs. PD expressed surprise at this statement and challenged him, particularly given the recent lack of clarity over BF budget allocations and consequential summer manning levels. PD asked that if these plans existed they should be shared with the respective airports.
4. GM set out issues pertaining to Newcastle International Airport, especially with regard to increasing passenger levels yet declining customer satisfaction levels with the border. NCL had been investing in border desks, yet there was no guarantee of manning in the months ahead. According to JB, planning was still being worked on, including seasonal workforces; and SLAs were being met, including providing additional capacity at peak times. However, he gave GM an assurance that there would be the necessary cover for the summer months. PD explained Bristol Airport's concerns. BRS was experiencing double-digit growth, and was itself investing heavily in five more e-gates as the current five are not enough. However, planning on things like e-gates need early dialogue and needs to take place a year in advance; and also BF needed to transparently match what it can do with what's actually required. CS discussed Liverpool John Lennon Airport, and expressed concern that border resources would be spread across both LPL and the sea port. There was the chance that queues at the border would be longer.
5. DC expressed concern that more advance planning was needed – resource levels shouldn't be being decided in April when the summer was so close, and GM mentioned that most airports plan financially far further ahead than just a few months. This would also allow BF to set out its longer term priorities too. DC also reiterated that the airports sector would welcome the chance to have a meeting or roundtable with JB on a regular basis to facilitate better communication nationally on BF plans and budget, as this would enable open ongoing dialogue – currently, being frank, the BF attitude is that SLAs are being hit and so airports do not have a problem with little need to discuss sectoral issues. Conversely, rather than sectoral discussions, BF wanted open local conversations, sharing planning and performance on a port-by-port basis.
6. Going forward, JB asked whether airport could be less 'peaky', and PD said BRS tries to do this, but – as GM said – it's very difficult to ask airlines to change their schedules. JB felt that dealing efficiently with double-digit growth would involve e-gates, improved productivity (delivering services more smartly), and – admittedly with implications for airports – where required, higher levels of investment in hall designs and the built infrastructure. He asked whether airports could encourage airlines to ask Italian and Greek nationals to carry better forms of ID than their current ID cards, which are difficult to process, especially with regard to being compatible with e-gates.
7. When asked categorically for a reassurance that the summer will be adequately resourced, JB was adamant that BF Director-General Sir Charles Montgomery and BF Chief Operating Officer Philip Duffy had given him the reassurance that everything would be okay. PD observed that it appears the Minister was being advised that everything was in hand and that BF are prepared for this summer – getting greater transparency over their plans would be hugely beneficial. JB concluded the meeting by saying that he felt BF was doing well and providing a good service.