

Birmingham Airport is going places

The Birmingham Post Business Awards is back and bigger than ever in November. Sponsor **Birmingham Airport** explains why it is getting behind the awards

THIS year has been a celebratory one for Birmingham Airport. Not only has it seen its 75th anniversary, it also completed a £200 million package of works, which culminated with the opening of the long awaited runway extension in July when the first aircraft used the extension to fly to Beijing.

This programme of works, spanning over several years, didn't just include the runway extension. It saw the merger of the two terminals into one to create a more efficient facility, the construction of a new air traffic control tower to allow Controllers to see the entire new runway length, better arrivals facilities and new shops, bars and restaurants.

Recognising this investment, The Prime Minister, David Cameron, visited the site in April this year to see the final lights being fitted on the runway extension by engineering apprentices, who gained full-time employment as a direct result of the infrastructure project. He also announced that 8,000 jobs will be created in the Midlands as Birmingham Airport expands to cope with increased demand from around the globe.



➤ Prime Minister David Cameron, second from right, inspects the new runway before its launch earlier this year

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The runway extension and development of the airport is the driver for future passenger growth, both in terms of long haul flights, connecting flights to feed the long haul network and increased demand for cargo freight movement.

The 400m extension gives airlines unlimited take off range because the extra take off length allows them take more fuel on board so they can fly further. This puts Birmingham in an ideal place to become an alternative gateway to the UK for long-haul air travel.

With the South East's airports increasingly congested and the Government's 'Airports Commission' looking at long-term runway options, the Airport believes that more needs to be done to maximise the use of what capacity the country has now, within its city regions. In Birmingham's case, the airport is just 70 minutes from London and can now cater for long haul routes to China and the US West Coast.

The airport's chief executive Paul Kehoe said: "The West Midlands is the only region in the UK with a positive balance of trade with China, with our advanced manufacturing base leading the way. Businesses in the region and beyond tell us that they want to fly to growing markets around the world from their local regional airport, not have to travel through the congested South East."

"With air traffic set to double over the next fifty years, the Airports Commission is rightly looking at expanding UK airport capacity, but we also need to see Government action to make better use of the airports and runways we have already. This means changes to tax rules to encourage airlines to use regional airports for long haul routes, and a concerted government-led marketing push around the world to let growing markets and foreign airlines know Britain's city regions and our airports are open for business. "With less than a year before the election, we will continue to engage with political parties, businesses and across the aviation industry, to debate how we can promote the role that the UK's great and connected cities and our regional airports can play in rebalancing the economy."

So far in 2014, traffic has been impressive, with four consecutive months of record passenger growth in April, May, June and July.

A number of factors are driving more passengers to use Birmingham Airport, not least because of the new investments already mentioned.

Birmingham is becoming an increasingly more important base for a number of airports too. Flybe, for example, decided to grow services this year and make Birmingham its largest base. As a result, passengers now have far more choice with the launch of several new routes including Florence, Cologne, Toulouse, Bordeaux and Porto.

The choice of long-haul services available has also contributed to the airport seeing passenger growth this year. In July, for example, it had a 7.7 per cent increase in long-haul traffic through services to Dubai, Delhi, Egypt, Islamabad, Jamaica, Mexico, Newark and Toronto, and Air India has just announced that it will increase its operation to daily from November.

Celebrations were plentiful on the 22nd July, when Birmingham welcomed the UK's first direct flight from China into a non-London airport - made possible thanks to the runway extension. The China Southern A330-200 aircraft, operated by one of China's leading tour operator, Cassia, arrived into Birmingham fully laden with 248 tourists venturing into the UK on organised package tours. The charter flights were the first in the UK to operate from China and the sell-out tours demonstrate the enormous demand for more flights between the two countries.

Looking forward, Birmingham Airport has been recognised as integral to the UK's long-term aviation model, supporting the growth of aviation links across the UK. The Airport's Commission will make its final recommendations to Government after next year's elections but whatever the eventual conclusions, it has already recognised that Birmingham can provide capacity immediately and in the longer term is an airport where demand may require a second runway at some point in the future.

