

Airport 2040 News

GATEWAY TO THE FUTURE

ISSUE 1 | 2012

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EARLY DAYS
OF AVIATION**

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While the island is not wholly reliant on air travel, life would almost certainly seem very different without Guernsey Airport. Whether for business, for tourism, or simply for leisure, it provides a vital gateway to and from the island.

Without doubt, our attractiveness as a place to do business would be severely affected were it not for our frequent, fast connections to the outside world, and in particular to other major business centres around the world via the UK.

And while the island's prosperity may no longer rely on tourism, there are still many local families and hospitality businesses that depend on these links for their livelihood.

Maintaining these links is therefore vital. Even in these times of financial prudence, investment in the island's key infrastructure remains essential if we are to continue to enjoy services we take for granted.

In the Airport2040 project, the cost is not inconsiderable. However to put that into context, Guernsey Airport provides around 650 local jobs and an annual income injection of some £31 million to the economy. Above and beyond this, however, its far greater contribution is the connections it provides to the island, and to its attractiveness as a place to live, work, or visit.

The Airport2040 project will ensure that continues for the foreseeable future.

Deputy Paul Luxon
Public Services Minister

Major works with future in mind



In early 2012, work began on a major programme of essential maintenance and improvements that will equip Guernsey Airport to continue serving the island for the next 30 years.

At a cost of up to £80 million, it represents the largest development at the airfield in its 73-year history, and one of the most wide-ranging and complex construction projects ever undertaken locally.

Critically, the Airport2040 project will address the deteriorating condition and strength of the runway, which was last resurfaced in 1974. However it is much more than a straightforward resurfacing operation, with several key elements of the airfield also in need of maintenance or improvement to bring them more into line with modern aviation standards.

The most significant of these are the apron areas, where aircraft park.

These are primarily concrete, much of it dating back to the 1960s. The obvious patchwork of repairs carried out over the years provides evidence that these surfaces have reached the end of their useful life, and require full reconstruction.

Another major aspect is the undulating profile along the length of the runway, which needs to be made more even, as does the land on either side.

Longer safety areas are also being created at each end of the airfield, requiring a new section of runway at the western end. It will be linked to the rest of the airfield by realigning the existing taxiway.

Other areas that need to be addressed are the drainage and airfield ground lighting, both of which date back to when the runway was constructed in the late 1950s. The navigational aids at either end of the airfield also require repositioning to align with the new ends of the runway.

All of these specialist tasks add to the overall complexity of the project and require significant airfield experience on the part of the main contractor, Lagan Construction. The work is expected to take around two years to complete, with around 150 staff at peak working around the clock to enable the airfield to remain operational while the essential maintenance and improvements are carried out.

Airport 2040
hotline

Given the scale and complexity of the project, and the need for night-working, a hotline number has been set up for anyone directly affected by the works. This provides direct access to the main contractor, and will be manned around the clock while night-working is carried out.

Lagan 24-hour Hotline: 238222

For general enquiries please call Public Services on 234684.

Lagan
24-hour Hotline:
238222

Aviation over the years

Guernsey takes its place in the skyways



The first civil aviation flight to arrive in Guernsey, a seaplane, touched down off St Peter Port on 2 October 1919 to discharge one passenger from Jersey. In 1923 the island's first regular scheduled air passenger service began, operated by flying boat, and some years later the first land-based airfield was established, at L'Eree Aerodrome, with a flood-prone grass runway around 400 metres long.

On the 13th April 1934, the States set up a committee to look into establishing the island's first proper airport. It reviewed various different locations, including L'Eree and L'Anresse, before concluding that current site at La Villiaze was the most appropriate.

The initial proposal by Aerodrome consultants Norman, Muntz and Dawburn was for an airfield of around 300 verges (120 acres). This would occupy an area of predominantly agricultural fields, with some farm buildings and houses, much of which would be acquired through compulsory purchase. It would comprise grass runways, hangarage, and a terminal building with a restaurant, bar and verandah overlooking the airfield. The proposal also identified additional adjacent land that could be acquired to extend the airfield in future, as commercial aviation developed.

Written during the very early years of commercial aviation, at a time when Guernsey had no permanent airfield, one passage in the Committee's report shows genuine foresight:-

'Although the recommendations are costly, Guernsey will possess an airport which should be capable of dealing with all future air traffic, and one which both directly and indirectly should ultimately become a valuable asset to the Island.'

Nearly 80 years later, experience has shown those words to be well-founded.

A Grand Opening

The new Guernsey Airport was opened on 5 May 1939 by the UK Government's Air Minister Sir Kingsley Wood, later to become Chancellor of the Exchequer in Sir Winston Churchill's wartime cabinet. It was attended by various dignitaries, both from the Channel Islands and the UK, and was marked by a fly past by an RAF Squadron.

The newspaper reports from the time sum up the excitement, with the Guernsey Press reporting the majority of shops in St Peter Port closed for the afternoon as islanders headed for La Villiaze in their droves. The following day, seven of its 12 pages were devoted to coverage of the event.

Rival newspaper the Star reported:

'Two thousand, including 500 schoolchildren, were seated in the enclosure, while thousands lined the approach to the entrance. By rough estimate some 10,000 were on the scene a half hour before the opening ceremony.'

The day's events were also recorded on film by British Movietone News, and shown in more than 1,000 mainland cinemas in what the Star described as the island's 'biggest ever publicity boost.'

And after the official ceremony was over, hundreds of islanders got their first taste of flying when they took to the skies above and around the airfield with freedom flights operating into the evening.

Early facilities

The cost of the airfield was just over £100,000. Of that figure, more than half was for land purchase, site levelling, surface drainage, and preparation of the grass runway surfaces.

It had four grass runways, to enable take off and landing in different directions depending on wind conditions, the longest of these being 1,000 yards (approx 915 metres). There were also facilities for landing at night, and direction finding equipment. The state of the art two storey terminal building housed the met office and air traffic control, as well as passenger-handling facilities.

The day after the opening, Guernsey Airways and Jersey Airways (later to become Channel Island Airways) began passenger flights to London and Southampton and weekend services to Shoreham.

By the end of 1939, despite a temporary interruption to services following the outbreak of World War 2, these services carried more than 12,000 passengers. The civil aviation age had arrived in Guernsey.



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To mark the airport's opening, UK Air Minister Sir Kingsley Wood announced that the RAF's 201 Flying Boat Squadron would be affiliated with the island. With it, a close bond was formed that lasted more than 70 years until 'Guernsey's Own Squadron' was disbanded in 2011.

Project off to a good start

Around 250,000 tonnes of special aggregate materials are being imported for the project. Another 120,000 tonnes of Guernsey granite will also be used.

The runway, aprons and other hard surfaces at Guernsey Airport cover an area nearly 30 times the size of the Wembley pitch. The runway itself is only around 10.

Since the works on site began in earnest in February 2012, the scale of the Airport2040 project has become evident from the amount of construction activity in and around the airfield.

For the time being, the normal rural character of the area has given way to a more industrial appearance - particularly in the fields opposite the main airport entrance. These are now the site of the main construction compound, where many hundred tonnes of asphalt and concrete will be prepared each day, ready for laying on the runway and other hard surfaces.

Considerable care has been taken in setting up the compound, including stripping away the top soil and putting down special materials to protect the ground beneath. Once the project is complete, all the heavy machinery and equipment will be removed, the soil put back, and the fields restored to their condition prior to the works beginning.

Progress

Work has also been noticeable immediately outside the terminal, where one of the first phases of the project saw the removal of the familiar raised grass 'bund' next to the main road. This was to enable the clean-up of some past pollution incidents, which involved excavating thousands of tonnes of soil from the airfield and replacing it with ground taken from the bund. This operation is expected to be complete in June 2012, after which the bund will be reinstated and landscaped.

Further afield, the temporary dock and storage facility has been established at Longue Hougue, where more than 250,000 tonnes of aggregate materials will be imported and stockpiled.

The operation to transport these materials to the airport has now begun, with main contractor Lagan Construction's tractor and trailer units already becoming a familiar site on the island's roads.

Two of the four planned airport closures have also been completed, enabling key elements that involve excavations on or close to the runway itself to be carried out ahead of the main construction phase, due to commence in the summer.

Lagan has also been constructing a new hard surface area in the south east corner of the airfield, which in the past has been used for parking private aircraft. This will pave the way for one of the main elements of the Airport2040 project, which is the reconstruction of the concrete aprons where commercial aircraft park.

For the airport to remain operational, that reconstruction work has to be done in phases, during which large sections of the main aprons will no longer be available for parking aircraft. Smaller commercial aircraft, such as Aurigny's Trislanders and Blue Island's Jetstreams, will therefore be relocated to this new apron area for the duration of this work, and a bus service will transfer passengers to and from the terminal.

A new form of aircraft parking, known as 'nose in push back', has also been introduced to make optimum use of the available apron areas.

Night-working

Some works have been taking place at night during the early phase of the project, particularly during the two closures but also for other works on the runway, drainage works, and the construction of the new apron area in the south east corner.

Once the main runway strengthening and resurfacing work gets underway during the summer, there will be nightly activity in and around the south compound and on the airfield itself.

However measures are in place to minimise any disturbance due to noise or light. For example, vehicles that will be used in the airfield at night have had their standard high-pitch reversing warnings replaced with a 'white-noise' version which is less audible outside the immediate vicinity.

Anyone who is directly affected at any time by the works at night can call the 24 hour helpline number and speak directly to the project team.



The terminal building with the excavations of the raised bund (centre) and main construction compound (top right).



Aggregate is offloaded at the temporary dock at Longue Hougue.



The edges of the runway are being reconstructed prior to the main overlaying operation this summer.



South compound, with concrete batching plant in background and behind it the Airport Terminal is just visible.

DID YOU KNOW?

The current runway is technically two runways - '09' for take-off to the west and landing from the east, and '27' for flights operating it the opposite direction.

Rare wetland habitat restored at L'Eree



A RARE wetland habitat at the Colin Best Nature Reserve has been restored as part of the Airport2040 project.

Guernsey Airport is working with local ecology consultants, Environment Guernsey, to help offset some of the impacts of the essential maintenance and improvements at the airport. The habitat restoration was identified as a suitable scheme to compensate for the loss of wet grassland in a field to the west of the airport when a longer safety area is created.

The Colin Best Nature Reserve is part of the L'Eree headland Ramsar site - a designation given to internationally recognised important wetland areas. It is currently leased and managed by La Société Guernesiaise.

In the 1980s, thousands of tonnes of aggregate were deposited on part of the reserve, to give easier access to

the fields. However this resulted in the loss of an area of saltmarsh that is a natural feature of the site, and very rare in the island. Although not particularly 'species rich', only Pulias Pond and Vale Pond offered similar habitat locally.

The aggregate has now been removed, paving the way for the saltmarsh to re-establish itself naturally.

Additional offsetting projects, including the creation of new hedgerows along the northern perimeter of the airport and tree and shrubbery planting schemes on various other States-owned properties, are also being considered.

Airport Closures

The Airport2040 project has been designed such that work on the runway and key systems is scheduled to take place after the airport closes each night, and then reinstated prior to reopening as normal at 6am each morning. This will enable Guernsey Airport to remain operational while these essential maintenance and improvements are carried out.

During 2012 there will be a limited number of daytime closures to enable key elements of the works to be carried out that cannot be completed during a normal nightly closure. These have been scheduled to minimise disruption to the travelling public and other airport users, and the remaining closure dates are:-

- Tuesday 27th/ Wednesday 28th November 2012
- Tuesday 4th/ Wednesday 5th December 2012

Why is the runway 1463 metres long?

In 1960, the first hard surface runway was completed. It was designed to accommodate a 74-seat Vickers Viscount aircraft, requiring a length of 4,800 feet, which in metric terms is 1463 metres. Although it has been widened since, and resurfaced in 1974, flights still take off from and land on the same stretch of concrete and tarmac today.

Does the project include a runway extension?

Although the start and end points for landing aircraft are being moved, the basic operational length of the runway will remain the same. An extension to 1700 metres was considered but at an additional cost of £25 million was not economically justified. Nevertheless this could be accommodated in the future.

Concrete change for compounds

ONE of the main construction activities for the essential maintenance and improvements at Guernsey Airport will be further away from homes and schools than originally planned.

The concrete batching plant was originally going to be located in the terminal compound, which is being set up adjacent to the main car park. This is directly opposite the Mont Marche estate and only a few metres from other houses in the area.

Contractor Lagan had originally expected to have two asphalt plants operating in the nearby south compound, to produce the amount of material required nightly at peak production. However following detailed scheduling of the work, it identified some operational adjustments that meant only a single plant is needed.

This left space for the concrete batching operation to be located in the same compound. It will now be more than 100 metres from the nearest home.

It means all construction materials will be prepared in a single location

instead of the two originally planned. Acoustic fencing, up to four metres high, has been installed around the compound, and other measures will also be in place to help to control any noise or dust.

The concrete plant will mostly be in operation during the day only, but some material will need to be produced at night during times of intensive work.

Guernsey Airport project manager Gerry Prickett said having all the asphalt and concrete operations in one location was good news all round.

'From a neighbour perspective, it means the risk of disruption is further minimised by moving one of the main construction activities further away from homes. From the contractor's point of view, they are able to concentrate all the batching operations in one location,

which has benefits. And for the project, we expect there will be cost savings.'

The terminal compound will now

be used for daytime parking and refuelling of vehicles and equipment used to lay new asphalt on the runway and taxiways at night.



The concrete batching plant installed in the south compound.