

# Airport Watch South West Press Release

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The Gravy Plane is Grounded:

SWRDA withdraws support for airport expansion because economic benefits unproven

The regional development agency has concluded that there is not enough proof of the economic benefits from airport expansion and will not be putting any further funding into expanding the region's airports. The news of this decision has been broken today by campaigners opposing airport expansion in the South West after they obtained the information from the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) under the Freedom of Information Act.

The campaigners from the AirportWatch South West coalition (AWSW), the umbrella for groups opposing expansion at six airports in the South West, have strongly welcomed SWRDA's verdict ruling out any further support by the development agency for expansion at the South West's airports.

SWRDA's report on sustainable aviation policy, prepared by economic and social development consultants EKOS questioned "whether any RDA investment in airports can be reconciled with 'economic growth' within environmental limits" and went on to admit that "air travel may not necessarily be a pre-requisite for economic growth," and "the relationship between high growth sectors in the region and air travel appears to be weak."

The report includes measures of economic importance such as direct and indirect employment.

It shows that in the longer term, employment at airports will actually fall between 2015 and 2030, as efficiency improvements such as automatic check-ins will "reduce employment densities." It concludes: "We estimate that employment growth will not be linear to passenger growth."

Based on this report, SWRDA's Board agreed not to "make any further investments in airports for the purpose of increasing passenger capacity." They also agreed to actively support measures for "greening" airport operations such as improved surface access, particularly by public transport, and said they would lobby specifically for improved rail connections from the South West to London Heathrow.

Spokesperson Neil Marshall, from campaign Concerned residents Against Staverton Expansion (CASE) says: "The airport's plans are not about safety, the agenda is expansion; Their own business plan talks about introducing more and bigger planes allowing for passenger services. Our local Airport even took to calling themselves 'Gloucestershire International Airport' for a while. The services the airport seek to introduce are contrary to this welcome news from the SWRDA."

He went on to say, "We have always been told that the economic benefits of airport expansion outweigh the considerable environmental impacts of noise, traffic and climate changing emissions. This report makes it clear that not even the local development agency now believes this and have stopped putting money into airport expansion. However, it's a pity they have not told anyone but the airports about this in the six months since they made the decision.

Furthermore: "Glos Airport makes great claims for the amount of money it generates for the local councils, but the £25,000 dividend it pays Cheltenham Borough Council each year is a pitiful return on the investment that the Council have made, and represents less than 25p for each resident of the Borough - hardly essential to the local economy.

Richard Conibere, coordinator of Cheltenham Friends of the Earth (FoE) says: "The regional government's plans to impose thousands of new homes on our town are already causing consternation. Though this housing madness continues it's good to see that the SWRDA are at least beginning to see the light on aviation. Though geared up for take off, it's time for Staverton's expansion plans to power down and return to the hangar"

"The SWRDA still needs to recognise that airports can never be genuinely "green" while they continue to increase the amount of climate damaging emissions they produce. Our local airport's plans for a 'Green Policy' are similarly suspect. We will be calling on the SWRDA to actively fund greener alternatives to air travel and to work to oppose further expansion at the region's airports."

ENDS

Notes for Editors

1) Documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act:

SWRDA Final Paper, Economic Assessments of South West Regional Airports, December 2007  
SWRDA Board minutes, 21 January 2008

2) Groups opposing aviation expansion:

AirportWatch South West, is made up of campaigners opposing expansion at Bristol, Exeter, Staverton (Gloucestershire Airport), Bournemouth, Newquay and Plymouth airports, all of which are facing significant expansion, and is a regional group of the national organisation AirportWatch.

The group forms a regional voice to oppose airport expansion across the South West by lobbying national and regional government as a united group.

Both CASE and Cheltenham FoE are part of a broader county-wide coalition, the Gloucestershire Airport Action Group (GAAG), opposing Staverton's expansion plans.