

CAA Consultation on Surface Access to Airports

Preliminary Comments to GATCOM

February 2016

Please note the below comments are those of an East Sussex County Council officer and may not reflect East Sussex County Council's final position when final comments are submitted to the CAA ahead of their deadline date for comments of 22 April 2016.

Purpose:

This consultation aims to ensure consumers have access to a wide range of surface access options, and seeks to gather evidence to get a balanced view.

The CAA recognises that surface access to airports is a key part of the consumer experience of air travel. As part of this consultation the CAA want to know what is / isn't working well from a consumer perspective.

The CAA think that competition is the best way to keep prices at a competitive level and to keep the quality of the service high.

The review is particularly focused on competitive conditions for road access to airports, which account for two-thirds of airport journeys, and for which there is a broad split between drop-off, car parking and taxis.

It should be noted that this consultation is not looking at rail.

The two main topic areas are:

1. Understanding the market structure for surface access, in particular how competitive conditions for road and forecourt access at individual UK airports affect outcomes to consumers
2. Transparency – to what extent are consumers well informed about options they have to access UK airports and charges they face

Key points / findings arising from the consultation:

- The driver of passenger choice is time (to get to the airport) and cost
- There are a variety of partners active in providing surface access services to different types of consumers, and to a varying extent they compete with one another
- Airport operators tend to control a large proportion of required facilities needed to run surface access operations (forecourt and surrounding areas e.g. car parks, interchanges etc)
- Surface access – one of the few areas airport operators have a direct commercial relationship with the consumer

- Surface access revenues are important to the airport, and can help to keep airport charges paid by airlines low (potentially boosting connectivity) and can lower passenger fares
- Passengers are not always aware of service options
- Consumers are expected to take reasonable steps to make themselves aware of the costs of travelling when they are planning their journey
- Airport operators are also expected to contribute to projects that make their airport more attractive to consumers. However, we are aware that airport operators may see increased use of public transport as a threat to their own car parking revenues.
- An example where the airport operator has been more active in communicating the availability of other providers is the Gatwick Approved Operators Scheme. This scheme is aimed at ensuring passengers understand whether they are purchasing car parking from operators that have demonstrated they meet planning and security requirements, as well as high levels of service. The scheme also provides clarity about the car parking options available at Gatwick, regardless of whether they are run by the airport operator or by third-parties.
- The Gatwick Approved Operator Scheme has other contractual arrangements that, as far as we understand, involve an agreement on prices paid by the approved operators to access the forecourt and on a discounted rate for these operators to access a specified area on Gatwick's short stay car parks
- price comparison websites aggregating several products do not necessarily present all the options available to consumers
- Drop-off fees have increasingly become a feature of the UK airport sector. We understand that these fees are intended to be a revenue raising tool contributing to the overall costs of the airport, and a way to manage congestion at the forecourt

Next steps and ESCC officer response to question:

The CAA is seeking evidence from stakeholders to identify whether further research on surface access to airports is required.

Airport operators are expected to deal with questions (a) – (g)

All stakeholders can comment on questions (h) – (m). These questions and ESCC officer comments in response to these are as follows:

(h) Have the CAA identified the key issues on market structure within the review?

ESCC response: no comments to make.

(i) Views/evidence on market position of airport operators in provision of airport services used to access the airport?

ESCC response: no comments to make.

(j) Have you any evidence or views on how well informed consumers are of their airport surface access options and on what is most important to passengers in accessing an airport? Is this an area that merits further research?

ESCC response: Access to information is of extreme importance for consumers in respect of their surface access options. Getting access to the airport is a priority in order to arrive in plenty of time ahead of flights. The return journey, whilst important, is less of a priority. Identifying ways by which access to a comprehensive set of surface access options is available for consideration is an area that merits further research.

(k) Have the key issues relating to distribution of airport capacity been identified, and what would improve the outcomes to consumers?

ESCC response: no comments

(l) Have you any views and/or evidence on how the information set that passengers have when choosing between airport surface access products could be improved for consumers?

ESCC response: Agree with the CAA that continuing to provide a free option for drop-off/pick-up in some form, even if it is not equally convenient as the paid option, should be a minimum standard for airport operators to meet.

(m) Views on proposed way forward and the development of good practice principles by airport operators?

ESCC response: Ensuring that consumers are able to access a full range of options for assessing what is the most convenient and financially acceptable way for them to travel to the airport is of great importance. It is recognised that the airport will want to promote those modes/services which they earn revenue funding from. However, consumers need to be aware that there are alternative options, and the onus does lie with the consumer in many respects to undertake the appropriate research to ensure they are getting the best value for their journey - in terms of convenience and cost. The suggestion that further research be undertaken by the CAA on surface access to feed into this process is supported.