

THE RISE AND FALL OF STANSTED AIRPORT

The continued downward slide in the number of passengers using Stansted Airport has led campaign group Stop Stansted Expansion (SSE) to call on BAA to scrap its misguided expansion plans for making the airport bigger than today's Heathrow with a second runway.

The publication today (11 June) of passenger numbers for the airport show a 4.4 per cent reduction in Stansted passenger traffic for the period January to May 2008 compared with the same period last year. This is the seventh month in a row that Stansted has posted a decline - now running at an average of 23,000 fewer passengers a week.

By contrast, Gatwick, which already handles 50% more passengers than Stansted - and has no plans for a second runway - continues to show steady growth year on year, despite the economic downturn.

In the past six months Stansted has lost all three of its transatlantic routes and now has no long haul services left. Attempts by Stansted's management over the past three years to establish new routes to Asia and the Far East have also failed to come to fruition and as a result the airport is back to being an airport focused on cheap leisure flights to UK and European destinations.

Further falls are expected with airport bosses predicting just 22.7m passengers in total for 2008 - a figure which may be over-optimistic given Ryanair's intention to ground ten percent of its fleet during next winter and to transfer further flights from Stansted to Luton.

A key factor in Stansted's decline has been the increase in airport charges imposed by BAA at Stansted since April 2007 to help pay for its expansion plans. Pending the outcome of a legal challenge, Ryanair has said that it will not pay the latest increase in airport charges levied by BAA in April of this year.

SSE Campaign Director Carol Barbone commented: "It seems that Stansted's management are so focused on pie in the sky expansion plans that they've taken their eye off the ball and are losing passengers in droves. They would do well to end their obsession with building a white elephant runway that nobody wants."

ENDS

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. In 2008, Stansted is expected to handle about 22.7m passengers compared to 23.8m in 2007.
2. Stansted has permission to handle 25m passengers a year and a Government decision is awaited on whether this can be increased to 35m passengers a year. Meanwhile BAA has submitted a planning application to build a second runway which it claims would handle 68m passengers annually by 2030.
3. Gatwick should handle close to 36m passengers this year compared to 35.2m in 2007.