



**Kerry Airport plc,
Farranfore, Killarney,
County Kerry, Ireland V93 KHF7**

Leinster House

Dublin 2

D02 XR20

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Opening Statement to Joint Committee on Transport & Communications

Dear Cathaoirleach and Committee members,

Thank you for this opportunity to meet with you and contribute to today's discussion on Ireland's National Aviation Policy. Firstly, let me take this opportunity on behalf of Kerry Airport, our Chairperson Denis Cregan & our Board of Directors to thank this committee, The Department of Transport, the Government and indeed all political parties for their continued support of aviation, particularly in the regions. It is always important to state, and I know many of you as representatives of rural constituencies fully appreciate, how vital an airport is as an access point both for industry and tourism in the less prosperous regions.

2022 was a rebuilding year for Kerry and I am happy to report to the Committee that the airport achieved 97% recovery from our highs of 2019 following what were two very difficult years for aviation. Worsened further for Kerry Airport by the failure of Stobart Air and the loss of our Public Service Obligation PSO on the Dublin-Kerry route. However, Ryanair committed themselves to the route on a commercial basis and they have made travel to and from our Capital both speedy and affordable. In fact, I can applaud Ryanair in the most public terms for increasing passenger numbers by 50% on the route from what was already a record base in 2019.

To survive these insults to our business we have had to be shrewd and resilient in our strategies which has resulted in limiting our operating hours and reducing our workforce. However, we share the same ambitious plans for our airport as Michael O'Leary shared with this committee last November. To grow our annual passenger numbers from 400,000 per annum to 600,000 by 2027. To achieve this growth, we have two important points to share with the committee and actions which we believe should in some form be part of a national aviation policy that supports regional expansion and a modest decentralisation of some air traffic.



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Firstly, coming to aviation from a background in healthcare management four years ago I could never have imagined or appreciated the difficulties and at times brick walls that smaller regional airports come up against when trying to attract new routes and new airlines. An impressive 26% of tourists to Ireland visit Kerry. Often via other airports including Dublin. Many tell us they would prefer to fly direct if the option was available to them. A new route will typically result in, even on a twice weekly rotation, 1,200 additional tourist bed nights per week during the summer season. One can see how positive that is on all areas of a rural economy including for employment and local SME's. It would be very encouraging if as part of the Policy development, members could consider new methods, financial and other, to attract airlines to develop inward routes from population centres in Europe and the United Kingdom to the regions such as Kerry. This could even be limited to a supported connection to London Heathrow or Amsterdam Schiphol for Kerry.

Secondly, to accommodate this growth Kerry must expand but expansion is very costly. We have drawn up a building plan, that is modest and achievable. It would enable us to manage cost by maintaining a defined operating window whilst growing passenger numbers safely. The drawings are done, the planning process is almost complete. I would ask the committee on a one time only basis, as I believe was done in the past for others, to consider supporting this expansion and enable us to grow and increase support to our local economy.

Finally, I must acknowledge the importance of the Regional Airport Programme RAP and its vital contribution to our airport. The programme has enabled us to achieve and deliver the highest standards in security, fire and air navigation services. A recent highlight was the introduction of the world's first Airport Fire and Rescue simulator.

Also, through the programme we had the benefit of the Dublin-Kerry PSO which was vital to keeping our regional economy connected. Again, I thank Ryanair for getting the route up and running on a commercial basis however if that should change, I urge the committee to ensure that a commitment to re-establishing the Dublin-Kerry PSO in a timely fashion should remain part of any future policy Development.

Go raibh maith agaibh go léir

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Mulhern', is written over a light grey rectangular background.

John Mulhern
Chief Executive Kerry Airport