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Response submission, Aviation Connectivity and the Economy

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## **CONNECTIVITY AND CONNECTABILITY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Airport Commission's Discussion Paper on Connectivity (DP), if conveying any indication of ranking of importance, is correct in making connectivity second only to demand issues. It is right to be connected to connectivity. However, the term is equivocal and we want to guard its proper sense and utilization. The discussion of the nature of C (connectivity) and the taking stock, at least of London's C, is adequate. But likewise there are deficits which need to be addressed to round out the picture and, more importantly, to show this issue's relevance to the overall work and *raison d'etre* of the AC (Airport Commission). For the analysis of the present may not serve you in good stead for the future.

### **POINTS TO PONDER**

1. Britain currently serves around 5 China destinations. Even now the demand is there to support 50 destinations on the basis of their freight potential alone.

2. London finally serves 1 destination in Indonesia (Jakarta). From China 10 destinations are served; and Jakarta is served 10 times.

## GENERAL CRITIQUES

### I. CONNECTIVITY AND COMPETITIVENESS

First off, no mention is made in the text of the B777-200LR aircraft. This and other such revolutionary aircraft, and possibly even longer flying, wider range, future aircraft, have made classical C a thing of the past. One can now say that almost every airport on earth can reach and be reached from every other airport on earth. This technological advance changes radically the whole landscape of C and the attendant competitiveness. Hence we are already flying from Seattle to Dubai, Singapore to New York, and theoretically Moscow to Honolulu. This has altered C beyond recognition and its full potential has yet to be exploited or brought to the surface. The DP does little to bring out or interpret for us this new technological wave of C or its implications for all airports and host cities worldwide. C is now, above all else, a competitive issue.

### II. INADEQUATE BENCHMARKING

In this same vein, the DP falls far short in the extremely useful, and all too often misused, aspect of benchmarking. The application of this important tool leaves much to be desired. Thus vital insights and comprehensions are withheld from the reader. The propensity in Europe generally to compare itself solely with its neighbors is here brilliantly put on display (except for Moscow). In a discussion whose underlying concern is, in the final analysis, the competitiveness and comprehensiveness of UK aviation, almost more harm than good is done via these

favorable comparisons of London's C with those of its Western European rivals. But Europe has the worst C of the earth's three major regions and is falling further behind. Such a juxtaposing can only serve the pitfalls of self-deception and self-imposed mediocrity. Benchmarking should not be self-congratulatory, but rather an aid in disclosing where the problems lie. No aspiring Olympian looks to past standards that will no longer qualify him, but rather to the achievements of the latest medal winners.

Benchmarking within Europe is counter-productive, being as the usual suspects are all themselves so overcrowded as better to serve a theme of how not to be connected. Those in the throes of congestion never enjoy the ideals of C against which each should be benchmarked. Benchmarking is not aided by calling in seven cities more congested than oneself. And imagine some sub-Saharan country saying about Africa what England in this report is saying about Europe. How serious should we take such a view in a now globalized world? Regional comparisons are for the most part passé.

### III. NO LIST OF ABSENT DESTINATIONS

Following up on this thought, where was an accurate listing of important destinations as yet not served from England, not even from London itself? This would have given the reader an overview into the extent of the problem. Only numbers instead of specific city names, connected and unconnected tends to render the whole enterprise opaque, if not murky. Statistics are given for, say, Asia, but it is only when the names of the missing are staring at you that a truer impression is formed of what is lacking. Instead an impression is conveyed that a slight dribble of new, hand-picked destinations will get the job done. It will not get the job done. We are provided only with singular exceptions where overarching information is essential.

Just how much C is being advocated? The DR is coy on this point. Are the dimensions and scope of the task fully appreciated or articulated? Just what are

we debating here? There is no prognosis of the sheer number and growth of destinations envisioned, although this is of the essence. And Asia comes far too short in the analysis offered, although this area's great potential must serve as a focus and warrants intensive elaboration. No projection, this is a serious lapse. Something needs to be said specifically.

This area is truly a study in abstraction that somehow managed not to touch down on the runway of concreteness. If C, which can be interpreted expansionist or via conflation, is supposed to alert us to our future needs, where is the sample list? We are unable to adjudicate scale where specifics are missing. We are left to our own devices.

#### IV. WORLD CONNECTIVITY ANALYZED

C needs an encompassing overview. I refer to this scheme with the term, 'Avio-Urbanistics', something of my own devising. For example, Asia should be divided into three sub-continent (greater India, greater China, & the rest of Asia apart from the Middle East – which forms yet a quasi-Asian, separate region.) All three of these are basically equal to Europe or North America in most regards. England would do well to analyze each on a separate basis to adjudicate the adequacy of its intercontinental C. But England has yet to exploit even its C to North America, satisfied with 20 when 200 are possible in the future.

C has to be re-calibrated to address the expansion of air cities. For the generation 1975 to 2000, there were around 100 aviation markets worthy of the name. That figure will rise to 1000 by 2025, and beyond that to the full 10,000 someday. This scale has to be comprehended and addressed to calculate the future needs of C. This is the proper context of C, the backdrop nexum. The forecast 1% rise in demand growth cannot be brought into line with the true scale of C growth. And new scales call for completely new approaches. This may be the real value of C debates.

## V. APPRECIATION OF WORLD AVIATION

A major problem seems to be here the rather parochial view and approach shown in the DP, now longer appropriate even to the home region Europe. The DP evidences an out-of-date understanding of world aviation and where it is heading, without which a true appreciation of C is muzzled. This deeply entrenched, underlying mindset is critical, a jugular. The DP is proud of 200 connections to Europe from London. No hint is given that this figure may grow to be 2000 in the future. It pays to recall that only the first century of aviation has passed. Intercontinentally the proud figure of 100 overseas destinations served from London is alluded to. Once again, no reminder that this figure will swell to 1000 if it has not already. Namely, the quantum leaps and the new orders of magnitude are ignored and conspicuous by their absence.

Operating in the background is a wholly insufficient and thus slanted view of worldwide aviation and impending future conditions. This remains the main handicap of the DP. One can see this in the limiting of benchmarking to European comparisons or even the following.

Imbedded in the principles of MAC (mutually assured congestion) is the awareness that your target destination will be even more crowded than yourself (cf. Beijing, Delhi). And that the best solution to securing new routes is to insure that your end does not remain the problem pole. This is accomplished by having enough capacity to provide the necessary flexibility to meet the other end's limitations and liabilities. The best chances of success lie in decongesting your own end. That is to say that C apart from complementarianism is incomprehensible today. This must be adjusted first or all will come to grief.

## VI. INBOUND INSTEAD OF OUTBOUND C

The very nature of C is presented from the wrong perspective. The orientation is falsely mirrored; London should be the target itself of C, the destination, and not the origin. Which standpoint in the final analysis is the more appropriate? We can see by this that the term, 'connectability' is preferable to the less illustrative C. C is presented in the DP as exclusively outward bound, always from the perspective of the British Isles looking out, while this is at best only one side of the coin. For example, British tourism (VisitLondon, etc.) will wisely give the most concentration to incoming tourism matters as opposed to outbound. The DP not only switches the emphasis the lesser way round, but deals from this angle almost exclusively, i.e. England to some benighted destination.

This is hardly salutary. The premise is backwards. C should be viewed and demonstrated in the main via people, airports, and cities wanting to come to you, not vice versa. There are a whole lot more cities wanting to come to you than you to them. And should not room be made for all these aspirations. Only the focus on this orientation reveals the full extent of C, and then the true issue becomes connectability. The discussion presented in the DP should be merely an adjunct to the all-important and failing theme of connectability.

The misunderstood standpoint orientation renders the DP analysis severely one-sided and out of equilibrium. Of the two possible orientations, the inbound perspective is the more vital and promising. To understand C sufficiently, it is more advisable to concentrate on everywhere else than to pursue the initiatives of the home market, which consideration goes unmentioned in the DP.

Let the other cities concern themselves with coming to London, not London to other cities. That is to say, C chooses you, not vice versa, or else your understanding and exploitation of C is insufficient. It is no longer a question of how much of the world does England need, but rather, how much of the world needs England. Everybody currently wants to be connected to England, but you do have to let them in. This study zeros in on how England feels about its C; whereas the better question must be how other countries feel about C to England.

For true C is determined outside the UK in the wider world. Let other countries do your C studies for you; this is a far more effective and revealing way of achieving England's C aims.

## VII. AVIATION MUSICAL CHAIRS

C issues tend toward divergent paths. The search for C expansion soon lapses into its opposite, namely which destination (actual or potential) can go the way of disconnection. The *raison d'être* of C swiftly switches from inclusion to exclusion, i.e. which cities can we do without. My sense is that you need every city; your competition thinks this way. The whole discussion of C thus seems to have been hijacked, if not in its entirety, at least in its tendency to calculate what we can do without (city X) given the capacity constraints. The question of the application of C as an instrument thereby denigrates to a question of 'not C', of what airports/cities can we do without given that there is only so much room to go round. Where can we best remain dis-connected?

I term this process a unique adaptation of a game now called aviation musical chairs, where instead of a chair being taken away every time before the music stops, in the world of aviation only one chair is supplied where two would be necessary to accommodate the newcomers. And when the capacity music stops, one destination falls by the wayside. The purpose of C analysis then consists mainly in adjudicating which one or ones this will be.

Namely, this DP application of C assumes congestion issues to be lurking in the background, although this is not openly stated or acknowledged. Under this scheme there is no indication that when capacity is both sufficient and generous (tied in with adequate reserve strategies) the whole game disappears. The game itself is a confession of looming or present overcrowding and the unlikelihood of solving it to the satisfaction of C ideals.

This is our old nemesis, mobility rationing, coming to the fore. C becomes a fig leaf for rationing and C becomes itself an issue where aviation assets are in essence

rationed. Where destinations apparently have to pass a C criterion and examination to be deemed legitimate, C soon becomes in effect, which chair can we take away. And the criteria often prove arbitrary and non-transparent. Why should routes have to subject themselves to this? It were better to accept all comers, and then of course C would take care of itself. Where there is plenteous accommodation, the theme of disconnection does not arise. Otherwise we find ourselves involved in the process of justifying something on some other basis than mobility freedom rights. The perpetration of C constraints simultaneously makes its perpetrator likewise the victim of the game.

## VIII. TOURISM

C is the soul of tourism and deserves its own heading. It is more than a first among equals. And tourism knows no selection process on the analogy of business concerns. For business, certain destinations just do not exhibit the advantages and importance of others. For tourism all destinations are important and lucrative. For business, certain destinations can be considered secondary. For tourism these are still primary. Business considerations may afford to sacrifice cities to congestion constraints. Tourism, by way of contrast, can hardly afford to do so. For tourism, congestion is practiced disconnection. World trends have started to understand the vital importance of the tourism and travel industry. And here C constraints are anathema.

Tourism should also be singled out, being as its very nature lends itself to the examination of the benefits of C, having an almost one to one correspondence. The DP does not exploit this. We turn away tourists when we turn away flights.

We are heading for a future where the ratio of runways to five star hotels (as representative of other lesser hotels) needs to reach one to one (from the current one to ten ratio). Likewise an available runway for every million guest-nights (currently standing at one to ten million) can be calculated in the future.



## IX. BRIEF SPECIFIC COMMENTS

2.2 You often cannot even transfer from Heathrow to Gatwick in 2 hours.

Table 2.1 Frankfurt has Hahn, Amsterdam has Rotterdam

2.4 It is over-simplistic to assign the decline from the past peak in C to the Lehman panic of September 2008 (oil hitting bottom in December). With a system so overcrowded, a degree of the overstuffing was bound to recede. But lack of capacity remains the *cantus firmus* here, economics being just the exacerbating factor (cf. Dubai).

2.9 Given current aviation conditions, capacity can be called the only driver.

2.9 Dubai's geographical position may be a help, but its success is far more due to the absence of non-stops to destinations it serves indirectly, affording it an almost monopolistic position. Vis-a-vis non-stops, however, its geography is a natural disadvantage.

2.10 Cathay Pacific, for example, does precisely this for the route Berlin – Hong Kong, adding thereby four hours plus stop-over time.

2.15 Europe is being marginalized.

2.17 The only sense of 'complicated' lies in unexploited opportunities.

3.8 We might add that flights should not have to justify themselves according to some narrow C criterion. The permission is in the existence of the flight. C is to be adjudicated by its possibility; its justifiability will then emerge.

3.10 The improvements to C provided via decongesting outweigh all these considerations put together.

4.1 This sentence is actually a tautology.

4.5 A metric is hard to develop with one side of the equation being a hypothetical; such are destinations not yet served.

4.7 The assessment of damage done by capacity constraints must elude any calculation unless the constraints themselves are absent; precisely this is what we do not enjoy. See also MAC.

#### Table 4.1 No ACI contribution

3.22 To avoid confusion I make it a practice to employ the helpful designation 'non-stop'; the term 'direct' then referring to the separate category of intermediate stops, but without switching aircraft. A yet additional category is afforded by the OAG to flights where aircraft are exchanged out, but the flight number remains the same, as if these too were direct. They aren't.

Box 3.1 The main problem with indirect connections is the implication that not enough demand is there for non-stops. Dubai succeeds to a large extent on this questionable assumption.

3.32 Congestion also is a damper on the aviation freight area and adds to those costs.

3.37 It might indeed be instructional precisely to try this in isolation.

3.39 The spending figures seem unusually low. Hotel charges alone could eat up the greater portion of these expenditures.

3.4 Never forget: each change of planes is saddled today with high airport fees.

## X. THE RELEVANCE/IRRELEVANCE OF CONNECTIVITY

The whole DP seems to have a Delphic oracle-like quality, compounded by an already equivocal use of the main term. C becomes an issue of sophisticated distraction. The theme of C does not arise in decongested systems. It is only really germane where congestion is a constitutive element in the system and is furthermore likely to remain in force. C has its rightful place as a subset of the demand forecasting factors, where acknowledgment is afforded the fact that destination numbers will undergo quantum leaps. The DP, while professing

clarification, has the effect of muddying the waters to the point of downplaying C as a ground for expanding capacity.

We must be on our guard against aviation policy as such being degraded to a discussion on C, and against desperate expansion needs being hijacked by one of its aspects. Airport objectives are vastly more than the singularity of C optimums.

C is only a backwater issue of the critical demand questions, representing only a subset or department of demand consideration and only tangential. And as such it can serve to distract rather than to contribute to proper solutions. The entire C approach famously has a track record of leaving your airports badly congested. C seems to be at best an auxiliary, at worst a distraction. C is a branch and offshoot, not the main trunk. Throughout the document C is treated in the abstract. What this means specifically for the AC's remit is withheld us. Nobody actually doubts the value of C, but as long as it remains on the abstraction level, the slipperiness defies any cogent conclusions.

The study of C can be a valuable exercise, but in the final analysis may not be germane to the main task at hand. The issue is not the bright side of British aviaional life in its past track record, but how to exploit it. And one must weigh up the anomalies: the best connected (currently) city with the most congested system; the maintenance in aviation rankings accompanied with a fall in the GDP charts. Past rankings should not be offered as a sop to future congestion concerns. We must not allow a discussion of C to erode our determination for adequate capacity.

While it is true that C depends upon capacity, it may not necessarily be true or follow irrefutably that C can then serve as a litmus paper test for capacity needs and decisions. It may in fact have little to say on such decisions, especially in the light of more compelling circumstances such as congestion issues or competitive issues. Keeping abreast of the competition involves a whole series of benchmarks, not just C.

C is not England's problem, nor will getting England's C perfectly right ultimately solve England's problem. C in isolation does not penetrate deep enough or get to the bottom of England's problem, which I define as the (in)ability to keep up with

world demand and global competition. Theoretical C discourses against the backdrop of an actuality of mega slot denying going on apace has a most unusual quality about it. The conundrum that England faces is on a wholly different scale than deliberations over C. To wit, England at this point does not possess the wherewithal, even assuming the will, to supply additional aviation infrastructure sufficient to meet demand growth and to maintain its competitive position, even timely authorized and working flat out. These other debates – not unwelcome in and of themselves – need to give way to the overriding concerns facing us. Otherwise demand will not only outstrip capacity, but the rate of the outstripping will accelerate. We find ourselves presently in a sort of aviation infrastructure arms race that dwarfs subsidiary considerations of C. And if all issues of C can be solved by decongesting, would this not be both easier and more appropriate? Decongest first – analyze at leisure.

## XI. Conclusion: Air-faring Nation

Connectability solves C, but C as presented in the DP will not solve Connectability. The impact of, and the relationship between, congestion and C evades being solved in this paper. It goes essentially unexplored and slips through our fingers.

The historical chance is there, however, for England to become an air-faring nation. Decongestion and a visionary understanding for the upcoming generations of air traffic levels can make this happen.