FLYBE PUSHES TO USE RAF NORTHOLT

News / Airlines

Flybe, Europe's largest regional airline, has called on the British Government to review the Ministry of Defence's refusal to give consideration to opening up **RAF Northolt** to a limited number of new Flybe domestic routes, linking underserved regions to London. RAF Northolt, currently used by private executive jets, VIP's and RAF transports, is 15 miles from the centre of London and ten miles from Heathrow Airport.

The airline stated that the recent Government Spending Review did not include Flybe's proposal to operate twice-daily return services to an initial five UK regional destinations from Northolt. This, it said, was: "despite the opportunity this afforded to provide improved regional connectivity to London, regional access to Heathrow Airport and much needed additional contribution to Government finances."

It added that the proposal, which is independent of any decision on the UK Airports Commission's recommendations on airport capacity in the South East, would bring the advantages of additional runway capacity to serve UK passengers in the immediate term and without requiring any taxpayer funding. According to Flybe, "The failure to back Northolt undermines the delivery of the Government's vision for the Northern Powerhouse by limiting access to London and onward global connections. This proposal would provide immediate regional connectivity, whereas [The high-speed rail service] HS2 is not expected to reach the North West until 2032." It added: "This

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proposal would immediately give many of the domestic benefits of additional runway capacity in west London, at no cost to the Exchequer, pending any opening of a third runway at Heathrow."

It concluded that a, "lack of proper consideration for this proposal also means that the Ministry of Defence's decision is walking away from substantial benefits," which the airline estimated would amount an estimated £3m in income to the Royal Air Force and a further £4m in Air Passenger Duty revenue to the Treasury.

Flybe also said it would plan to investigate, with Heathrow airport, a direct bus shuttle link between the two airports for connecting passengers.

Heathrow responded by stating: "Using Northolt would be an interim solution to the capacity constraints at Heathrow which have existed for over a decade. The fact that Flybe want to bring more UK passengers to Heathrow is a vote of confidence in the hub model and in the strength of domestic demand.

"We are committed to improving domestic connectivity and we want airlines like Flybe to fly straight into an expanded Heathrow."

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