

Transcript Of Dail Debate

Wednesday 6th November 2002, 9.15PM, Adjournment debate, Dail Eireann:

Airport Expansion.

Mr. Sargent:

Ba mhaith horn buíochas a ghabháil leat as an t-ábhar tábhachtach seo a roghnú anocht. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as teacht chun freagra a thabhair air.

The background to the proposal for a new northern parallel runway at Dublin Airport is rooted in the enormous distress it is causing in the communities of north County Dublin and north Dublin generally. **The chairman of the board of management of St. Nicholas of Myra national school said on 6 October last -**

this will be of interest to the Minister for Education and Science who is present that the problems currently caused by Dublin Airport due to exhaust fuel and noise pollution are already unbearable. Teachers must suspend activity as pupils cannot be heard when there is peak noise level when planes are taking off. This occurs about 15 times per hour. This noise level is stirring up the problem of deafness, which I presume will be of interest to the Minister.

The Sunday Times recently reported a study of 350 children in Munich, Germany, which indicated that when the city airport closed, the performance of children in the vicinity improved significantly while those based near an airport that was being opened up disimproved significantly. Skills such as long-term memory, reading and speech perception were all affected, depending on proximity to the airport.

The community school in Portmarnock, which has more than 800 pupils, has found that exams, particularly foreign language exams, have had to be interrupted because of the noise from the airport, particularly when planes are taking off. This noise level also affects schools in St. Margaret's, Rivermeade, Malahide and Swords and the flight path of the proposed new runway would go directly over those schools, which would make matters even worse.

The proposal for a fourth runway would drown out the quality of life the safeguarding of which should be uppermost in the Government's mind - of the more than 8,000 people in Portmarnock where, under the Fingal county development plan, the number of houses is set to double. Current runway capacity would allow expansion to 28 million passengers and even that would be enormous in terms of its impact. A cap is needed on the expansion of Dublin Airport, which should be a priority for the Government.

There are plans to push passenger numbers from 14 million currently to over 40 million a year. That would be a nightmare scenario, not only in terms of noise pollution, but also in terms of congestion. The terminal built in 1972 would have to quadruple in size or four such terminals would have to be built. The current 18,000 car parking spaces would have to rise to 50,000. Such development would lead to a

does not. Counsel in a future court case would no doubt ask the question as to why further congestion was allowed to be concentrated in north Dublin with the building of another enormous runway when areas to the south and west of Dublin, the centre of Ireland and along the west coast find Dublin Airport more and more inaccessible. Once the Dublin Port Tunnel opens a lane of the M50 will effectively become a truck-way further obstructing traffic to and from Dublin Airport. Even the shrewd Michael O'Leary of Ryanair thinks this proposed new runway is a foolish flight of fancy by Aer Rianta.

Why has the Government, as the main shareholder on behalf of the people, been silent on this runway proposal? The most logical reason is that it wants to sell Dublin Airport as a potential mega airport, three or four times its current size, and its attitude is to hell with the chaos and havoc such a monstrosity would wreak on the nearby communities and, conversely, the isolation such development would cause to far off communities with no major airport within reach.

When does the Government intend to cap the size of Dublin Airport and when will it ensure that there is balanced development countrywide so that air traffic is not centred at Collinstown? The airport was built at that location in the first instance to avoid difficulties because there were then no housing estates nearby. I also appeal to the Minister for good government and sustainable planning in relation to this trojan horse for privatisation, which will lead to the ruination of people's lives in the future.

Mr. N. Dempsey:

I convey the apologies of the Minister for Transport to Deputy Sargent. The Minister was present earlier but he was obliged to attend another engagement.

As the House is aware, proposals on the development of the three State airports, including Dublin Airport, are in the first instance a matter for Aer Rianta which has statutory responsibility to manage, operate and develop the airports and to provide such facilities and services as it considers necessary for aircraft and passengers. In due course the Minister will consider the company's proposal for a new parallel runway from shareholder and policy perspectives.

Dublin Airport is the country's main airport, serving the needs not just of the travelling public in our capital city and the surrounding counties but of the country's tourism and business sectors generally. Notwithstanding the greatly to be welcomed increase in traffic over recent years at Shannon and Cork airports and, to a lesser extent, the regional airports, Dublin airport will remain crucial to the national economy.

Apart from being the country's main access point by air, Dublin Airport has been and remains highly significant in terms of the local economy of the north side of Dublin and provides substantial and valuable employment for the people of the surrounding areas, both directly and indirectly, through the multitude of service industries that have evolved over time in and around the facility. This, of course, is also true of the other two State airports at Shannon and Cork.

Aer Rianta proposes to apply for planning permission for the new runway to Fingal County Council next year. That planning process will provide a forum for all interested parties, including local communities, to have their views and concerns taken into account by the planning authorities. As part of the environmental impact statement which will be required to accompany the planning application for this new runway, Aer Rianta will resume its public exhibition at Dublin Airport for a further week, beginning on 11 November, to explain the project to the local community and the public in general. As part of this process, members of the public have been invited to put forward views to Aer Rianta on any matter they feel should be taken into account in the EIS.

The other Irish airports are, of course, important to the regions they serve, but it is neither feasible nor realistic to propose that they could in some way cater for the traffic which wishes to fly into Dublin Airport.

Dublin Airport, as well as the other Irish airports, must be in a position to provide the facilities necessary to cater for fixture traffic growth and, accordingly, the Minister has no plans to cap the growth of Dublin Airport. The Minister is conscious that some interested parties, such as local communities around Dublin Airport, may have concerns about the future expansion of the airport. However, he must also bear in mind the needs of other sectors, such as the business and tourism sectors, manufacturing industry, international cargo operators, charter operators and their passengers. The continued growth of these sectors, which are vital for the country's future economic development and jobs, depends on adequate transport infrastructure being available to accommodate that growth. This is as true for airport infrastructure as it is for other modes of transport.

Mr. Sargent:
It will not grow if-----

Mr. N. Dempsey:
It is vitally important for the continuing development of

our economy that not only must existing infrastructure deficiencies in our transport system be addressed, but we must also ensure that no new bottlenecks are encountered in the future.

The Minister can readily appreciate that one of the main concerns of local communities relates to the issue of aircraft noise. In this regard, Aer Rianta has installed and commissioned noise and flight track monitoring equipment which will provide precise measurements of the noise generated by all arriving and departing aircraft at Dublin Airport, as well as monitoring and recording the track or flight path flown by these aircraft. This equipment will facilitate the most affective management of runway operations at Dublin and assist in ensuring that local communities experience the least possible disturbance from aircraft noise. **The Minister understands that Aer**

Rianta will make the data from this monitoring system available to the local communities and the planning authority.

Mr. Sargent:

It has not done so to date.

Mr. N. Dempsey:

In addition to these measures, the local communities should also derive some comfort from ongoing efforts to improve aircraft technology which are aimed at reducing aircraft noise at source and providing quieter aircraft.

The Dail adjourned at 9.35 p.m. until 10.30 a.m. on Thursday, 7 November 2002.