

News story: Aviation Minister visits Inverness Airport to welcome increased connectivity for the Highlands

A series of new routes opening up from Inverness Airport this summer will provide an economic boost for the region.

New flights operating from Inverness to Bergen, Zurich and Majorca will offer passengers new destination options as well as export opportunities for local businesses.

Daily flights to Heathrow from the airport saw 79,000 passengers travelling on the route in 2017. This figure is projected to increase in 2018 with the number of weekly flights set to increase from 7 to 10 over the summer.

This important route boosts the export of goods and services by businesses, gives passengers access to the wide range of destinations offered from Heathrow and opens up the Highlands for visitors from across the world.

Today (1 June 2018) the Aviation Minister met leading businesses in Inverness to discuss how the Highlands could see even greater connectivity with Heathrow expansion.

Aviation Minister Baroness Sugg said:

With new destinations and increasing numbers of passengers passing through its terminal, Inverness Airport is going from strength to strength.

With up to 15% of new slots at an expanded Heathrow reserved for domestic flights, it would deliver even more opportunities for greater connectivity across Scotland, benefitting both passengers and businesses.

We've already seen a big increase in tourism and exports following the introduction of a new Heathrow flight in 2016, and we want the vibrant city of Inverness to see an economic boost through the growth of its high performing businesses and more visitors to the cultural capital of the Highlands.

Inverness and other Scottish airports could benefit from strengthened routes to Heathrow with expansion which improve connectivity for passengers and businesses and boost the regional economy.

Goods and services exported from Scotland valued a total of £29.8 billion through over 12,000 exporters last year.

And the latest figures show Inverness Airport's total passenger numbers increased by 92,000 last year, further illustrating the airport's popularity and increasingly important role as a driver for the Highland region and economy.

Today the minister met the Inverness Chamber of Commerce and businesses such as Jacobite Cruises and Gordon & MacPhail whisky and distillery to discuss the growing strength of the airport and how to boost connectivity to the Highlands.

HIAL managing director Inglis Lyon, said:

We very much welcome the minister's visit to Inverness to see for herself the work being undertaken to further improve connectivity and nurture sustainable growth. It is vital for the entire Highland region that the Heathrow link continues to thrive. We very much appreciate the opportunity to explain to the minister the importance of continued investment in aviation and associated infrastructure to maintain growth, not just in the airport, but for the wider Highland economy.

When the Heathrow flight was reintroduced in 2016 we were confident of its success and the impressive increase in passenger numbers in the years since its reintroduction shows that demand is very much there. Only by continued investment in services and infrastructure will be secure our future growth.

Following the launch of a route between the Scottish airport and Heathrow in 2016, the city has benefited from more than £8 million per year as a result of tourism according to the Inverness Chamber of Commerce.

Jacobite Cruises, the longest running cruise company on Loch Ness, reported a 12% rise in visitors just 4 months after the daily air service between Inverness and Heathrow was introduced.

The government remains on track to lay a final Airports National Policy Statement before Parliament for a vote in the first half of this year, subject to consideration of 80,000 consultation responses and the recommendations of the Transport Select Committee.

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