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Is Manchester Airport our biggest asset?

Manchester Airport – our biggest asset?

Andrew Harris reports

RIGHT: A computer-generated aerial image of the transformed airport
BELOW: American Airlines flies daily flights to Chicago, New York and Philadelphia in the USA





Britain is very London-centric as a hugely disproportionate amount of the country's population, wealth and infrastructure are concentrated in London and the south east. This disadvantages all the other English regions together with Scotland and Wales but there is one activity where our region – and all northern England – has largely eliminated this disadvantage; it is civil aviation.

It could have been very different. Manchester's first airport was at Wythenshawe in 1929 then Barton the following year. By 1934 it had been recognised that Barton didn't have the potential to cater for the bigger aircraft coming into service even then. Far-sighted people identified Ringway as the best location and construction started in 1935 with a new terminal building opening in 1938 - just in time for the new airport to become RAF Ringway in preparation for the coming war. The expanding airfield served many roles during the war including flying, parachute and glider training. It mainly served as a delivery point for 4,400 aircraft built on site and many more ferried from aircraft factories throughout the north west.

It wasn't until 1957 that all military use came to an end and the development of civil

flying could begin in earnest. By 1981 the then single runway had grown to 1.86 miles and could be used by long-haul international traffic. With more and more services attracted to the airport a second runway was planned in the mid-1990s and became operational in 2001. Since then growth in facilities, traffic and passenger numbers has been phenomenal with aircraft able to land or take-off on the two runways at the same time.

In 2001 the airport's municipal owners formed MAG - the Manchester Airports Group - which later invited private capital to fund new facilities and the purchase of London Stansted, East Midland and Bournemouth airports. MAG is still controlled by Manchester City Council - with 35.5% - and the other nine Greater Manchester Councils (Bolton, Bury, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford City, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan) which own 29% between them.

A record 23.5 million passengers used Manchester Airport in the 2015/16 financial year making it the busiest and most successful UK airport after London's Heathrow and Gatwick Airports with 75 and 40 million passengers respectively. Apart from London Stansted – owned by MAG - no other major

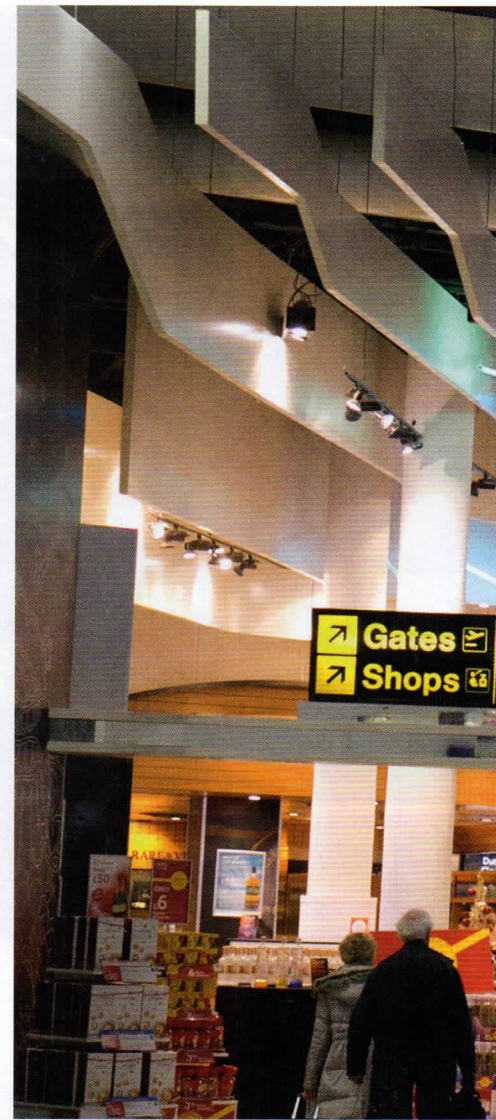
The region already derives enormous benefit from Manchester Airport

airport in the UK is used by more than 12.5 million passengers a year with all but 3 in the range of 3-9 million passengers.

Manchester Airport is one year into a 10-year transformation but more of that later. It already benefits the north west region in three major ways –

- It serves over 70 airlines and links us to more than 210 long and short haul destinations which provide business and leisure benefits which would otherwise only be available to people in the region indirectly via London Heathrow or a more remote hub – all involving more time and expense. Manchester Airport is the only UK airport outside of London with direct routes to a host of global destinations including Atlanta, Boston, Hong Kong, Jeddah, Los Angeles, Miami, Singapore, Washington DC and – from June 2016 – Beijing, Mauritius, Phuket, Tobago and San Francisco will be added to this list in the next few months.

- It contributes hugely to the regional economy. Gross Value Added – or GVA – measures the contribution to the economy of any industrial or commercial activity. A recent report by consultants York Aviation reported that Manchester Airport supports £722 million in GVA and 18,400 jobs by on-site activities and £125 million and 3,100 jobs by off-site





**ABOVE: An airport is about shopping as well as flying
LEFT: A computer-generated image of the main terminal building transformed**

activities. The wider region benefits by £550 million of GVA and 14,800 jobs by indirect impacts and £385 million and 10,300 jobs by induced impacts - or trading activities. This translates to 46,600 jobs and a contribution of £1.78 billion to the regional economy.

- The Airport City Enterprise Zone attracts economic activity and is a hub for growth. This site encompasses offices, advanced manufacturing, logistics facilities, hotels and ancillary retail. As it is next to Manchester Airport it is well positioned to attract business from, and do business with, the UK, Europe and the wider world.

The region already derives enormous benefit

from Manchester Airport – but the story doesn't end here. MAG is now implementing its 10-year 'Manchester Airport Transformation Programme' which aims to ensure that the airport not only continues to thrive but plays an even greater role in support of the north west economy. The main features of this £1 billion programme are –

- Terminal 2 is to be dramatically expanded by 140% and reconfigured to become the airport's main terminal building.
- Terminal 3 to be improved to cater for increased demand and more flights.
- Airside transfer facilities to be improved and include the linking of Terminals 2 and 3.



Qatar – one of 70 + airlines serving Manchester Airport

- A new and larger security hall to include the latest technology to screen more passengers more quickly.
- The provision of new stands and piers with better departure gate facilities.
- Access roads will be improved to make it easier for passengers to arrive and depart from the airport.
- A new facility to enable US-bound passengers to clear US immigration, customs and agricultural inspections before boarding their flight.
- A range of other improvements to help passengers including new self-service check-in facilities and about 50 outlets for food, drinks and shopping.

MAG emphasises that the Transformation Programme will be phased so that disruption to passengers, airlines and airport operations will be minimised.

MAG promise a better experience for all passengers – and more of them. Although the capacity of the airport is limited by a maximum of 61 aircraft movements an hour the impact of this restriction on passenger numbers is reduced by the trend to more wide-bodied aircraft which carry more passengers. The new record of 23.5 million passengers a year was achieved with fewer aircraft movements. It is



expected that this trend, new routes and the Transformation Programme will enable Manchester Airport to grow to 35 million passengers a year after 2025.

It is encouraging that these projections are not based on optimistic forecasts but on the solid build-up of business over many years. 2016 sees the anniversaries of many airlines starting services to and from Manchester. They include Air France (70 years), Lufthansa (60), Scandinavian Airlines (50), Singapore and American Airlines (30), Delta Airlines (25), Virgin Atlantic (20) and 10-year anniversaries for Etihad Airways and Icelandair.

Earlier this year another celebration followed Manchester Airport being

named the UK's Best Airport – for the second year running - at the Globe Awards hosted by Travel Weekly.

Well done Manchester Airport; this columnist is convinced you are the region's biggest asset.

Andrew Harris FRICS FCIM has a background in economic development for the north west and has been responsible for an airport.

All illustrations courtesy of the Manchester Airports Group.

