

VIDEO – Edinburgh MSP demands competition on Heathrow route



Colin Keir is the MSP for Edinburgh West and Edinburgh Airport lies firmly within his constituency.

We spoke to him just after the announcement that Virgin Atlantic will withdraw their Edinburgh to London Heathrow route from next autumn. Colin explained that it is vital that these slots are not lost to become international routes and that competition continues. Little Red began their service in 2013 after BMI gave up their Edinburgh to London slots. The MSP fought hard then to ensure that there was competition for the busy route.

Mr Keir said: “My fear now is as it was then, if these Heathrow slots are not reserved for Scottish routes local travellers will suffer. There is also the fear that because of the monopoly which will be enjoyed by British Airways the cost of flights will be held artificially high. Connection flights to the rest of the world could be limited to BA partner airlines from Heathrow if there is a monopoly. This along with Air Passenger Duty which means that Scottish air travellers who are already being unfairly treated at this time may have to pay even more.”

He continued: “The Airport is doing remarkably well as we all know, however this loss of flights between Heathrow and Edinburgh Airport really affects the competition element. We will be stuck with one carrier in British Airways. Now I have no problem with British Airways, however it is better to have an alternative when you are using Heathrow. There are plenty of methods to get to London through Gatwick, Stansted or

wherever but Heathrow is important in terms of connectivity. Moving on from Edinburgh into the continent or long haul it is vitally important that we have a degree of competition to get the best deal for travellers out of Edinburgh.

In answer to our question about Ryanair offering to 'step into the breach' by offering more flights to Stansted from next year the MSP was emphatic that while this is welcomed it is not quite answering the real problem: "It is a form of competition, but it is not direct competition. If you look at the major hub in the UK at this time it is Heathrow. We have to say find ways of getting people from Edinburgh onto connecting flights without having to use one carrier. If you go on to the computer or if you use a travel agent then the first thing that comes up is the BA flight to London which will connect you to your international flights. If there is competition you at least get the option of choosing the airline you wish to fly with which affects the cost element for tourists and businesses.

The MSP spoke to Virgin Atlantic following their announcement: "They were very disappointed in having to withdraw the service but it obviously was not working for them and the business plan they were using. There is a year to go till the flights stop in September next year so that gives us a bit of time to move on to find a replacement, and to find out more crucially about the Edinburgh to Heathrow slots. That is really the key here because if the slots return to BA then the last thing we want to happen is for them to be redesignated international flights rather than domestic ones. This is the important thing and was the fight we lost last time round when there was a year's monopoly before the situation changed. We must find a way of some other airline taking over the route from Virgin to allow the competition to continue."

A spokesman for Edinburgh Airport said: "We're disappointed with the recent decision but we will of course give Virgin Atlantic Little Red all the support we can during its last

year.

“Edinburgh Airport’s success is built on giving our passengers choice and whilst we’re disappointed to be losing this service, we know that an opportunity still remains. We’re sure that others will be interested in exploring this with us.”