

As is the case here on Alderney, many may not be fully aware of the history of Alderney's transport links. For this reason, I have taken the liberty of dissemination this information as a form of 'Belt & Braces' insurance to ensure that everyone is fully acquainted with the situation as it is was, to what it is now.

Please take the time to read through it, as it may give you a better insight as to why the Alderney populace is so disgruntled with the way in which their links to the outside world have degraded over the years.

THE PAST

Going back in time, Aurigny supplied the service that Alderney needed (and in fact all the Islands at that time) to flourish.

Using level 3 aircraft, out of a level 3 airfield meant that they were able to offer multiple flights to Guernsey, (between 5 and 7) and Southampton (usually up to 5 a day, although we did manage 21 during one Alderney Week), with the services suffering less disruption due to wind and weather, as all aircraft, including the later used Twin Otter (which did everything the Islander/Trislander did; only better) were able to use the exiting grass runways. The opportunities were also available to operate services to Bournemouth, Shoreham, Cherbourg and Caen, plus the Alderney/Guernsey/Jersey triangle.

Being adapted for mixed roll (pax & freight), the freight service between Guernsey/Alderney /Southampton was a thriving part of the business, augmented as it was by the postal service; not just letters, but the greater part of our parcel mail. It also gave freight capacity for the companies set up to deal in motor parts, medication supplies and fishing equipment to run their businesses.

It also allowed us to operate the most efficient medivac service the Islands have ever known, with the expectancy of moving an Alderney patient to the PEH in 35 minutes 24/7, made possible by having both crew and aircraft based on Alderney, the latter of which were fitted as standard with quick change seat/stretchers adaptations.

Everything that Alderney needed, without any cost to the taxpayer by way of loan write offs, guarantees or subsidies.

THE PRESENT

Compare that with what we have now: A passenger only service in an aircraft that is not, in any shape or form, suitable for the work required of it. It is extremely expensive to both operate and maintain, thereby producing high operating costs, It is too often performance limited by weather, or runway conditions, or inoperative due to technical issues. It also has a higher landing minima and cannot operate on or off the grass runways in high wind conditions. They are not equipped for dual-roll operation, so are virtually committed to a passenger only role (although letter mail is carried by contract). The companies that relied on Aurigny to transport their freight between Alderney and the UK have all gone out of business, Parcel mail and deliveries from other carriers remain on Guernsey to be shipped by sea on a Thursday

They are incapable of operating Medivac flights, as any change from passenger to medical roll requires engineering to be carried out on Guernsey prior to the collection of the patient from Alderney. If appointments have to be made, the PEH, or MSG are contacting patients by telephone in an attempt to co-ordinate appointments to see if it is possible to get to Guernsey and back on the same day. This doesn't help expectant mothers though who are now expected to position themselves to Guernsey several days before their anticipated birthing date, stay there until the birth, then do their best to get back when they can.

The final indignity to any late Alderney resident, is no longer being able to transfer mourners and their departed loved ones down to the Foulon cemetery by air. The only means that this can be achieved, is by having to load family mourners and the departed onto a local boat for

their final journey. On a windy winter's day with an active sea, is this really the way to give their loved one a dignified departure from this world?

The net result of these restrictions and the aircraft's inability to undertake the tasks in the same manner as its predecessors, has resulted in Aurigny no longer being able to carry out what was once considered to be the normal' needs of the community, but requiring payment of a £2 million a year subsidy and a PSO in place to establish minimum service levels in order to maintain the present self-imposed limited and inadequate service.

THE FUTURE?

So what is in store for a limited ATR72-600 operation into Alderney should the funding be approved for Option C+?

At best, two rotations a day between Alderney and Guernsey have been mooted, with, according to Deputy Helyar, the possibility of only serving Southampton in peak season. That's it. Nothing else.

At what time of the day is an unknown element, as at present the entire ATR fleet leaves Guernsey first thing in the morning, meaning that it will not have any aircraft available to operate an Alderney service until after they return. The same being true later in the day.

There is sometimes a 'spare' ATR available to cover technical issues (although this would probably be utilised following the disposal of the Embraer jet), but to call out a complete flight/cabin crew team on a split shift, just to cover two Alderney rotations is not best use of its resources.

The lengthened runway would allow the off-island medivac service to land on Alderney, using their present aircraft, but and it is a big but, time is of the essence in the early state of trauma, and no off-island service can act as quickly as an Alderney based medivac aircraft and crew.

The mention of other carriers coming to Alderney and the 20,000 extra seat myth are just that; pure speculation, with no sound substance.

Whilst Guernsey continues to operate a 'closed skies' policy, no carrier will be allowed a licence to compete with the States owned airline to defend its monopoly position. I have been assured that the figure of 20,000 seats has no bearing on the decision to extend the runway, it was nothing more than a possible numerical bonus that has unfortunately been used as a major Option C+ 'selling' point, certainly by our Alderney politicians.

HOW DO WE DEAL WITH THIS CATASTROPHIC LOSS OF SERVICE?

Big is not always beautiful and sometimes the solutions for today can be generated from the experiences of the past, using today's advancing technology. But to do this it will be necessary to ditch the present tendency towards taking decisions on the basis of kudos and image and think positively about what we need, what we would like to have back and how we do it.

Much has been written by those, including myself, who have in depth knowledge of aviation and tourism. Getting the message across has not been easy, as many of those supporters of the 'big plane' theory, will never have experienced the past about which they are such prolific writers.

As has been proffered by all who wish to regain our original levels of service to the Island, it is essential that both Aurigny and their owners, the States of Guernsey accept that operating level 2 (regional) aircraft into a level 3 airfield has never worked anywhere else in the world and it certainly won't work here.

The only real way forward is for Aurigny to either change its business model so that its regional arm operates as a level two carrier and they either generate their own level three operating division, make a planned withdrawal from operating the Alderney hub, thereby opening up an Alderney hub route structure, or probably the best option: to have a working arrangement, or partnership with an existing level 3 operator that between them would be able to provide not

only a full range of 'local' destinations from its Alderney hub (including Southampton), but would provide a frequent and reliable link to Aurigny's regional hub operating out of Guernsey.

Now unlike Deputy Roffey's thoughts on the matter of benefitting the taxpayer over an eleven-year period, this development would result in the saving of £millions on the difference between Option B and Option C+, removing the need for a PSO and the saving of a £2million a year taxpayer subsidy through to 2025.

Now that really would be an all-round 'win – win' situation of which we could all be proud.

P.S. With the promise that I have no commercial association with any of the level 3 operators concerned, if all that could be achieved, whilst at the same time following the time line of a successful Zero emission operation, that really would be a 'feather in your cap' bonus achievement for the Islands.

Ralph Burridge.

16th October 2022