



GATCOM

Gatwick Airport Consultative Committee

# Chairman's Annual Review 2007/08



**John Godfrey  
Chairman**

## *Introduction*

Two weeks before I took up the chairmanship of GATCOM from my distinguished predecessor, Peter Bryant, an international terrorist cell tried to bomb a crowded London nightclub and to drive a truck packed with high explosives into the terminal at Glasgow airport. These incidents took place less than a year after the discovery, in August 2006, of the alleged plot to high-jack trans-Atlantic airliners from Heathrow and fly them into civilian targets in North American cities. Throughout the year, the national security state has remained at Severe, increased briefly to Critical at the time of the London and Glasgow incidents. Sussex Police commander at Gatwick, Supt. Robin Smith, describes the Severe security state as "the new normality". Not surprisingly, dealing with the consequences of heightened security measures for the passenger experience at Gatwick dominated the year under review.

## *Security*

Security concerns led to the access to the forecourts being restricted, the installation of unsightly, but necessary, concrete blocks in front of the terminal entrances, the imposition of a one bag rule for passengers' hand luggage, a ban on liquids being taken through security and enhanced passport checks for EU citizens arriving back in this country through Gatwick. All these measures impacted on the passenger experience. The challenge for BAA Gatwick was to install additional security machines, undertake new security protocols and to recruit and train additional security staff and welcome hosts, so that the impact on passengers of the additional work involved as the result of the new restrictions was kept to a minimum. But new security lanes and trained staff took time to install and this delay led to queuing and discontent.





### ***Passenger Queuing Time***

Managing Director Andy Flower reported to GATCOM in July 2007 that BAA Gatwick was not achieving its target of passengers queuing for no longer than 10 minutes for its agreed operational hours. Over the summer holiday period, performance further declined, but by October there was some improvement as more security staff were put in place, and 80 per cent of passengers were queuing for less than 10 minutes. By the time of our meeting in April 2008, Gatwick's target was being met and the number of complaints significantly reduced. Less progress was achieved in relation to queuing at immigration. Lengthier procedures introduced by the Home Office coincided with a reduction in immigration staff at Gatwick, resulting in British citizens having to queue for longer than an hour in the summer of 2007 to get back into their own country. I took this up with the Minister for Immigration and we are encouraged that there has been an increase in staffing at Gatwick. We will continue to monitor the situation.

### ***Price Controls and Capital Investment***

BAA Gatwick makes its money by charging airlines to use the airport and letting shops and catering facilities in the terminals. As BAA owns a number of airports, including the three principal London airports, its commercial relationships with its airline customers are regulated by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). During the year, the CAA completed its five-yearly review of BAA's airport charges and new arrangements, which allowed for significant increases in the charges made at Gatwick, were introduced from 1 April 2008. In the course of the negotiations leading up to the decision, BAA set up a programme of constructive engagement with its airline customers, which identified a programme of improvements and developments required at the airport, to be financed out of the income from increased charges. As a result, BAA is committed to a programme of £874m of work at Gatwick over the next five years, to provide capacity growth, primarily in the North Terminal and with capacity capped in the South Terminal.



### ***Gatwick Express and Railway Station***

GATCOM continues to take a keen interest in the opportunities for passengers and staff to get to the airport other than by private car. Of particular concern is the rail connection to London and other destinations in the South East. GATCOM strongly supported the campaign waged by BAA Gatwick to secure the retention of the Gatwick Express as a dedicated airport express service. We remain sceptical about the decision



to extend the service to the South Coast during peak hours, resulting inevitably in a far less satisfactory service to airport passengers wanting to use the railway. The key to the retention of the dedicated service from Gatwick, and to the improvement of the whole rail experience for passengers is the redevelopment of Gatwick railway station, including the provision of additional platforms dedicated to the Gatwick Express. GATCOM has been pushing for this for years and there now does seem to be a real possibility that a comprehensive station redevelopment scheme may be implemented in time for the London Olympics in 2012. We are pressing Network Rail hard and receiving regular progress reports.

### ***Passenger Advisory Group***

Other passenger issues which GATCOM has pursued with BAA Gatwick and other partners during the year include the improvement of facilities for people with impaired mobility and we have recruited to our passenger advisory group someone experienced in this area. We warned BAA Gatwick against the introduction of coin-operated trolleys in the arrivals halls and were saddened, but not surprised, that the provision of inadequate numbers of change machines led to difficulties and complaints. We have advised BAA Gatwick on the redevelopment of the South Terminal Departure Lounge and, at particularly busy times, members of our passenger advisory group have been found assisting BAA Gatwick managers and staff to reassure queuing passengers and ease their passage through the airport. I am particularly grateful to the volunteers who make up the passenger advisory group for all that they do, but this highlights the fact that BAA Gatwick could do better in this area.

### ***The Local Environment***

GATCOM has continued to monitor the environmental impact of the airport on local communities. For the first time, we have been able to identify a figure for the total annual carbon emissions arising from Gatwick and we have received regular reports on air quality, particularly from sites in the immediate vicinity of the airport which we can use to alert BAA Gatwick. We work closely with Gatwick's Flight Evaluation Unit (FEU) and monitor complaints received about noise and track-keeping and how they are being dealt with. During the year, GATCOM has taken a particular interest in noise issues connected with flight arrivals, especially to the east of the runway. As a result, the Managing Director and I visited Hever and Marsh Green to see the situation for ourselves and discuss





the issues locally. The effect of the new arrangements for Continuous Descent Approach (CDA) on communities such as these is being closely monitored and, at our suggestion, the general issue is to be investigated nationally by the Department for Transport.

### ***Review of GATCOM***

I took the opportunity, as incoming chairman, to lead a review of the way in which GATCOM is constituted and how it does its business. As a result some changes have been agreed which will be implemented from our annual meeting in July 2008. We will say farewell to some long-standing members including the vice-chairman, Hilary Sewill, who has been a tower of strength and a source of great wisdom and expertise for many years. We will welcome new members from bodies such as Kent County Council, the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), Tourism South East and South London Business. These new members will better equip GATCOM to perform its role as the critical friend of the airport, a role which is of the utmost importance as we await decisions on the future ownership of the London airports and contemplate the possible implications for the future of Gatwick in the year of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of the South Terminal in June 1958.

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