

# 27 Government retains Shannon stopover

By Jim Dunne

THE compulsory stop at Shannon airport for all transatlantic flights is to continue for the foreseeable future, and there will be no direct access to Dublin from American airports, the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Communications, Mrs Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, has announced.

Aer Lingus had now accepted that the Shannon stop was in its best interests, Mrs Geoghegan-Quinn claimed yesterday, a reversal of the airline's earlier attitude. Aer Lingus has refused to comment on the Minister's statement.

Mr Paul Sheane, the chief executive of Shannon Development, said that as the country's designated transatlantic gateway, Shannon had a pivotal role to play in achieving an ordered and regionalised spread of economic development in Ireland.

The decision was bitterly condemned by Mr Tom Coffey of the Fly Dublin Direct committee. Airlines would continue to bypass Ireland, he said, and "she (the Minister) may well go down in history as the person who delivered the *coup de grace* to Aer Lingus". Mr Ted Murphy, chairman of the Irish Airline Pilots Association, which also favoured a change in the Shannon policy, said: "I am amazed, to say the very least."

Bord Fáilte, which had advocated the ending of the stopover, commented that getting the level of growth from North America which Ireland needed would be more difficult now, but "as a State body we must accept today's decision by Government . . ."

Mrs Geoghegan-Quinn re-affirmed the traditional Shannon status and also announced the setting up of a special traffic develop-

ment task force for Shannon Airport with a budget of £1 million over the next two years.

The Minister said it was wrong to suppose that there was a queue of American airlines lining up for direct access to Dublin. Quite the contrary, she added, she knew of no airline that wanted direct access. Mrs Geoghegan-Quinn denied there had been "inexplicable delays" in reaching yesterday's decision, though on taking office in March she had promised early action.

People in the region, she went on, had good reason for believing that to allow Aer Lingus and US carriers to overfly Shannon would result in the West of Ireland being excluded from the itinerary of US tourists.

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