

Shannon Airport — a new hope

Supersonic air travel the answer

by
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THE statement by Sir Giles Guthrie, O.B.E., the new Chairman of B.O.A.C., that Shannon Airport had a great place in the supersonic jet age will be welcomed throughout Limerick and Clare. This new development in the air-age—due to materialise in about five years time—may well be Shannon's salvation in a highly competitive struggle for locations.

He was visiting the airport to carry out an inspection of the B.O.A.C. V.C. 10 jet training scheme at Shannon, which will cost the company £1,900,000 during the next five years. Sir Giles, the ex-banker and flight pilot, had an allegation levelled against his company when he flew in on the new V.C. 10. The allegation was that B.O.A.C. was restricting tourist traffic from London to the west and south-west of Ireland by limiting the number of services that can be made by Aer Lingus to Shannon. Sir Giles promised to have the matter looked into without delay.

Asked why his company had not included Shannon in its schedule for the coming year, Sir Giles said that he had only been in the company for three weeks and that he was having a complete review of all routes carried out.

IT WILL COME

The Shannon problem has been growing in recent years. Every effort is being made by American and other airline companies to gain permission to fly into Dublin Airport and while this permission has been refused on a number of occasions, all indications at the present time suggest that Dublin will be opened up to all airlines in the not too distant future.

Alitalia, the Italian airline is reported to be interested in flying into Dublin from Rome. This was stated by Signor Giorgio Mariani, General Manager of the Company, on the occasion of a recent visit to Dublin. It is of interest to note that he made it clear that the service depended to a large extent on the development of commercial links between the two capitals. Aer Lingus, he said, operated flights to Rome, so naturally his airline was anxious to fly into Dublin—but this would depend on the traffic. No question of whether or not permission to fly into Dublin would be forthcoming.

Considerable regret has been expressed at the B.O.A.C. decision to by-pass Shannon in the summer months ahead. It has been stated that they no longer find a stop at Shannon profitable. Fortunately, B.O.A.C. are availing of Shannon to the maximum for training purposes and their major programme is adding very considerably to the prosperity of the airport.

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HARDENING OF FEELING

Another matter which poses a question is the recent decision by C.A.B. refusing permission to Irish International Airlines to fly a new route, Dublin to Montreal and to New York. Many have taken this as a clear-cut indication of the hardening of American feeling because the American airlines are not allowed to fly into Dublin. In fact, there is a general feeling among people

flight there. In the fifties many Irish people emigrated to Canada and have done well. The travel potential among these people would have enabled Aer Lingus to maintain its records set in the United States and provided Ireland with an additional tourist revenue. It has been suggested already that at least one major American airline will be flying into Dublin next year—maybe sooner.

There will also be changes on the European front in 1965. Most important of these may be a jet service by a new European carrier, B.E.A. also seem likely to develop further in 1965 by doing their own handling at

a hook to morale. Last year Shannon had an overall increase in terminal traffic and 61 per cent of the U.S.-Irish traffic compared with 35 per cent for Dublin Airport. Irish Airlines carried 35 per cent more passengers on the North Atlantic but 60 per cent of these were persons who specially requested to disembark or embark at Shannon.

The total North America-Ireland traffic grew to 124,743 passengers last year compared with 108,331 in 1962 and 70 per cent of this increase occurred at Shannon. Altogether an additional 19,000 passengers started or ended their journey at Shannon in 1963 which was an increase of 16 per cent over the preceding year. Another welcome feature of Shannon's success was the news that the sales in the airport's famous duty-free shops last year exceeded £1,250,000. All this came at a



An Irish International Airlines jet flies out over the Irish coast.

well placed in this important business that this may well be the beginning of the American pressure.

Pan Am and T.W.A. two of the major airlines with close on 200 sales offices throughout the United States, make no secret of their claim that Ireland is losing valuable tourist business because the average American traveller wants to travel between capital cities. To him, Ireland is Dublin or for that matter Rome and Italy are synonymous.

The Dublin-Montreal route would certainly have been a winner but at present it would be uneconomic to terminate a

Dublin Airport and maybe opening a sales office in Cork in conjunction with Cambrian Airways.

MOST CRUCIAL YEARS

While there is no doubt that Shannon faces its most crucial years between now and 1969, the recent statement that 1963 had been one of the airport's "most hopeful for a decade" comes as

time when Shannon Airport had been feeling the pinch as a result is a drop in the amount of transit traffic with fewer of the big jets calling on their way between the United States and Europe.

LITTLE LIKELIHOOD

While the big jets of the present continue to link all parts of the world there is little likelihood that Shannon will be bypassed provided, of course, that it is maintained as an international airport. If, on the other hand, Dublin is opened up to all airlines Shannon will have to work even harder to

maintain its position as a major international airport. The fact that Shannon has been able to attract such a large number of passengers is a testament to its excellent facilities and the excellent service provided by the airlines operating from the airport. It is hoped that the new supersonic jet service will further enhance Shannon's reputation as a major international airport.

But what will happen if Dublin is opened to all transatlantic aircraft? Shannon will not suffer seriously if the runway at Dublin airport is not extended because jets with a full load of fuel would not be able to take off and would, therefore, have to land at Shannon to fuel up before heading out over the Atlantic. The question is, however, will the Government make the necessary investment to extend the runway in Dublin. The answer is that eventually they will.

NO WILD DREAM

The statement made by Sir Giles on Sunday has given a new hope to Shannon. Indeed, in many circles it is believed that Shannon will become the terminal for the Concorde supersonic jets, mainly because of its ideal location and excellent facilities. From Shannon a feeder service would operate serving Britain and many parts of Europe. This would be of tremendous importance to the future of Shannon and make it a key point in the jet age. Indeed, it is a secret that certain investigations with a shrewd eye on major developments of international importance have been going on at Shannon for some time. This has been denied in the past and I have no doubt it will be denied for some time to come but the hint dropped by Sir Giles makes it quite clear that the idea of setting Shannon up as a base for supersonic flights is definitely no wild dream or wishful thinking.

It is something our Government should watch very carefully and take every step to develop. Shannon is too important to the people of Limerick and Clare. Too many families depend on it. Indeed much of the future of the nation as a whole is at stake in the contest with the rest of the world for Shannon. It has already achieved much for Ireland. Now is the time to ensure that it finds the place in the age of supersonic air power.

