



NICK WESTON ON REGIONAL BUSINESS AVIATION ROLE TO POST CORONA BOUNCE BACK

News / Business aviation



Regional business aviation airports preparing themselves now for a post Covid-19 fightback will be a significant factor in restarting not only the economy but also the business aviation industry. This is the key message that Nick Weston, CEO of Weston Aviation is keen to point out as the UK joins the majority of Europe in starting to relax lockdown measures and easing travel restrictions.

The lockdown experience has of course shown many that home and virtual working is viable and a good workable alternative to the traditional office and commuting practice and there are of course no doubt the environmental and infrastructure benefits that should be encouraged. However, business travel must and will continue and now, day by day restrictions on travel is easing. The demand for both business and leisure travel will be running ahead of the commercial airlines ability to restart routes and getting back to full service. This is where business aviation will show its full and real potential as a cost-effective business tool that helps to drive commerce and not just a preserve of the rich and famous.

Regional airports will also play a significant role in the rebuilding of business aviation and the economy. For many years, Weston Aviation has invested in FBO services and facilities

at smaller regional airports where previously none existed. At all of the Weston Aviation owned and operated FBO locations, year on year growth has seen an increase in airport movements and revenues.

The simple reason for our success is that we don't see ourselves as an FBO, a charter brokerage, a fuel company or an airport tenant, we are multi-resource company that works closely in partnership with our airport owners and management teams with one objective in mind, mutual growth. Traditionally, regional airport FBO's and airports themselves have failed to capture growth with a reactive approach accommodating aircraft movements day to day rather than a pro-active approach planned carefully around the potential of an airport and its capability to grow. The message of how viable, efficient and cost-effective business aviation is, rarely leaves the airport perimeter fence to be spread to the local business community that could and would use it.

Regional connectivity will be the key to bouncing back post-Covid 19. As airlines may take up to two years to once again operate to their previous 2019 schedules, business aviation will not only facilitate flights for passengers as and when they need, from their local smaller airfield instead of the main well known business jet hubs, they will also get closer to the final destination saving an incredible amount of time.

Charter Brokers need to consider smaller regional airports more too. I have previously tested this by giving a post code in the middle of the Cotswolds and been offered flights to Bristol or Birmingham, when Gloucestershire, Cotswold and Oxford Airports are much closer and convenient. The smaller regional airports also need to play their part and promote the benefits of business aviation locally. Earlier this year I attended a business dinner in Cheltenham sitting with many high net worth individuals and local business leaders. Only one person had chartered an aircraft once before and despite Gloucestershire Airport being only four miles from where we were in Cheltenham, no one else in the room realised that business aviation existed.

We are all anticipating business aviation seeing a surge in demand not only for connectivity reasons, reassurance of travelling with known colleagues and family but also due to the lack of airline routes, capacity and reliability issues. The airport terminal experience is not going to be a pleasant one for quite some time with increased check-in time, longer queues, shortage of facilities and of course the increased risk of infection.

As we begin the bounce back, let us all fully consider the full range of regional airports that are available to business and private aircraft. If you are a broker, just look a little closer to see if there is a smaller and closer regional airport that you can use as there are many. If you are a regional airport owner, open the gate, step outside and tell your local community of your incredible facility with flexible flying right from their doorstep. One new customer is an additional movement, airport fee and fuel sale. Let's break the mould, shake off the reactive past and be ready to rebuild.

Established in 1995, Weston Aviation is one of the UK's leading business aviation support companies in the UK and Ireland with FBO facilities at Manchester, Humberside, Cornwall Newquay, Gloucestershire and Cork Airports. The company offers owner operated FBO facilities and services, Hangarage, worldwide fuel sales, aircraft charter and general business aviation and FBO development consultancy. Nick Weston is the CEO and founder of Weston Aviation and has over 34 years aviation experience and is also the former Chairman of The Air Charter Association and continues to sit on the associations board.



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