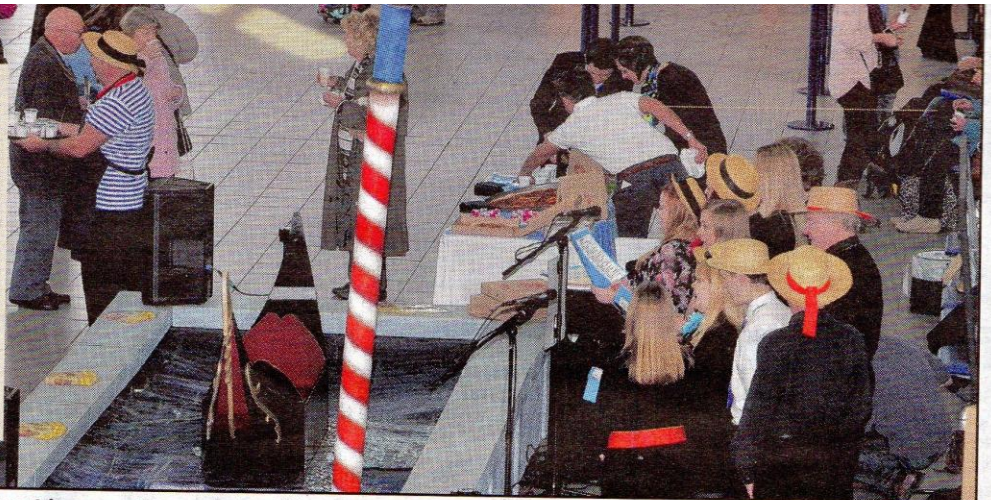


NUMBERS

- April 2012: 41,000 passengers use the new passenger terminal for the first time, compared to just over 5,200 in April 2011
- July 2012: 41,700 passengers arrived for the Olympic Games
- August 2012: 91,300 passengers pass through the airport
- December 2012: 53,700 passengers jet off over the festive period.



■ Getting busier – Southend Airport is expecting up to 5 million passengers a year

Picture: ANNA LUKALA BA75820

Airport passengers set to top 5 million

MORE than 5 million passengers a year could pass through Southend Airport after its £10million terminal extension is finished this year.

The figure could even be as high as 8 million if easyJet's planes are used at full capacity for each flight.

The Stobart Group, which has pumped £100million into the airport since buying it in 2008, already predicts 2million people a year will use the airport by 2020.

But in its annual report the firm claims the airport will have space for 3 million more than that when the extension is fully open by Christmas.

Campaigners warn the report will strike fear into the hearts of people living under the flight-

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path. The airport and Southend Council point out the number of flights is capped at 53,300 a year – about half the number using the airport in the Eighties.

Council leader Nigel Holdcroft said: "For those who live under or near the flight path the most important statistic is surely the number and direction of flights rather than simply passenger numbers.

"The restrictions on flight numbers, direction and times are enforceable both under the planning permission previously granted and the provisions of the airport lease.

"In the meantime the success of the airport is to be welcomed and we need to maintain our efforts to ensure that this activ-

ity delivers maximum economic benefits for the town."

In total 721,661 passengers flew from the airport in the year leading up to February 2012, almost 30,000 more than in 1967 when 692,000 used it in what was a record year. Back then the airport was the UK's third busiest and had featured in the film *Goldfinger*.

If easyJet's A319 aircraft, which have 156 seats, flew all 53,300 flights to and from the airport at full capacity, more than 8.3million could use the airport.

But Aer Lingus Regional, the other airline to use the airport, mainly uses 48-seat aircraft and the 53,300 "movements" allowed from the airport include all flights.

A number of reports over the past decade, including one for

the South East local Enterprise partnership last year have suggested Southend Airport has potential capacity for more than 5million passengers.

Alastair Welch, managing director of the airport, said: "We believe the airport is well placed to support the capacity constraints predicted to exist in the south east of the UK over the next ten to 20 years and this has been reinforced in submissions to the airport's commission.

"Whatever the capacity of the airport, we will continue to operate within the agreed legal framework, which currently limits movements to 53,300 per annum."

The first phase of the terminal extension is set to open this month.

More flights to Spain and Portugal planned

MORE flights are already on their way for Southend Airport.

Airline easyJet will add a fourth plane to its fleet based at the airport and start flights to Berlin, Krakow and Newquay next month.

This comes after TUI Travel restarts weekly package holiday flights to Palma, Majorca, at the end of this month.

Alastair Welch, managing director of the airport, said easyJet is planning to add more flights to Barcelona, Alicante in

Spain, and Faro in Portugal. The airline flies to each between five and seven times a week, but hopes to increase this to eight to Faro and ten to the Spanish destinations.

Aer Lingus Regional has said it plans to add an extra flight each way on its service between Southend and Dublin.

The airline hopes to double passenger numbers on the route from 55,000 in its first year up to this month, to 100,000 a year by May 2015.

Protesters say limit numbers to 2 million

ANTI-AIRPORT campaigners have called for a guarantee that capacity will be capped at 2million passengers.

Stop Airport Expansion and Noise has called on Southend Council and Rochford District Council, which granted planning permission for the Stobart Group to extend the runway by 300m and build a new terminal, to go public on whether they will allow more passengers.

Jon Fuller, vice chairman of Stop Airport Expansion and

Noise, said: "Local residents have always feared the expanded terminal and longer runway would lead to increasing numbers of passenger flights, making the lives of the local community an absolute misery.

"We demand an assurance passenger numbers will never be permitted to go over the 2 million mark and an end to all night flights."

But the authorities have made clear they limit the number of flights, not passengers.