

Why things are soaring at Southend Airport

9:00am Thursday 10th April 2014 in [Local News](#) [By Philip Jones](#)



Passenger numbers grow and more routes planned - why things are soaring at Southend Airport

SOUTHEND Airport is well and truly on the up with ambitious plans to serve more than five million passengers by 2020.

Since the [Stobart Group](#) took over the airport in 2008, the company has spent more than £120million renovating, expanding and modernising the terminal.

A new railway station has also been built to improve links with London, and with this investment has come awards.

Which? Magazine named it the British airport of the year in 2013, with a staggering 84 per cent customer satisfaction rating.

And earlier this year it was named as Europe's fastest growing airport, with a 57.1 per cent rise in passengers during 2013.

In the 12 months to February, the airport passed the one million passenger mark, having fallen just under in the 2013 calendar year.

With last week's announcement of six new Flybe routes to northern European destinations, that growth is only set to continue.

The £10million terminal extension, opened by Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin on Monday, has increased the capacity of the airport and made space for the new flights.

Airport operations director David Lister said: "This year our target is 1.2 million to 1.3 million passengers.

“It’s difficult to put a true figure on an airport’s capacity as it depends on the schedule of flights, but with the current terminal we could accommodate four to five million passengers a year.

“For us to continue to grow, we need people wanting to fly to where we can fly to, but we also need a positive economic situation in the region and in the country.”

Last week’s announcement of the new routes will see 102 weekly flights in and out of Southend, when fully operational.

The new destinations – Caen and Rennes in France, Munster Osnabruck and Cologne in Germany, plus Groningen in the Netherlands and Antwerp in Belgium – were all carefully chosen.

Mr Lister highlighted the pertinent timing of flights to Northern France as the centenary of the First World War is upon us.

All the cities are vibrant university towns and Mr Lister thinks they will all prove popular as tourist routes.

The new flights are being laid on by Europe’s largest regional airline, Flybe, but the planes and routes are actually part of a tenyear franchise agreement between Flybe and Stobart Air.

Formally Aer Arann, Stobart Air has a similar deal with Aer Lingus, which runs daily flights from Southend to Dublin.

Simon Fagan, chief commercial officer of Stobart Air, said the new routes were chosen as they do not currently have a direct link to London.

He added: “The German destinations offer good locations for city breaks, especially in the winter time with their Christmas markets.

“And I can see the northern France locations being popular with outbound passengers from Southend during the summer season.

“But all the routes offer a connection with London for regional European airports which wasn’t there before.”

While the destinations’ tourist attractions are rightly highlighted, another key aspect to the new routes is their business links.

From September, when all the routes are fully operational, the two Flybe branded planes will be based overnight in Rennes and Antwerp, meaning the first flights of the day will see passengers coming in to [Southend Airport](#).

The new routes won’t just be good for business people on the continent, as they bring with them 60 new jobs to boost the Southend economy.

Split between four Flybe crews of 15, the jobs will range from cabin crew right up to pilot, and Mr Lister sees it as good news for the area.

He said: “There will be more jobs in the airport as well and it will be a significant benefit to the local job market overall.

“The vast majority of people working at the airport are local to the Southend area.

“It is one of our key objectives to continue to provide the community atmosphere and small regional feel at the airport.”

The airport is already preparing to hit the two million passenger mark four years ahead of schedule.

It will take 1.3 million this year, rising to 2.5 million in two to three years and 5.5 million in future. Originally, the terminal was estimated to handle twomillion by 2020.

Mr Lister said: “We are not going to rest on our laurels. We have a big part to play in the South East over the next few years.

“We are going out to Marseille soon for a routes conference to discuss new options over the next few years.”