



Opening Statement of Airports Council International – Europe Region for the Joint Committee on Transport Meeting to discuss the General Scheme of the Dublin Airport (Passenger Capacity) Bill 2026

Dublin, 25 March 2026

Airport connectivity is key to socioeconomic development

ACI EUROPE thanks the Committee for this opportunity to share its views on the bill regarding the passenger capacity of Dublin Airport. Airports Council International Europe is the trade association representing the interests of 600 airports across 55 countries. Our members facilitate over 95% of commercial traffic in Europe. ACI EUROPE has extensive experience in playing a constructive role in the formation of aviation policy. ACI EUROPE's mission is *“to advance the development of safe, secure, sustainable and efficient airports for the benefit of the travelling public and businesses, as well as local and regional communities throughout Europe”*. In carrying out this mission, our General Assembly has mandated us to focus specifically on the interest of passengers and the development of air connectivity to support the economic and social development of airport communities. Today, I am providing a perspective based on work with airports across the European landscape.

ACI EUROPE urges the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport to swiftly endorse the Dublin Airport (Passenger Cap) Bill 2026 and to allow Dublin Airport to fully serve the demand for connectivity to and from Ireland.

Evidence from Europe shows that this is the right thing to do, and it can be done in a way that correctly considers the people and communities around the airport.

The process of setting capacity caps for airports must be forward-looking, not backward-looking. Allowing Dublin Airport to reach its growth potential will (1) unlock broader socioeconomic benefits for the country, (2) amplify Ireland's air connectivity, and (3) better serve the travelling public.

1. Unlock broader socioeconomic benefits for the country

A recent study by SEO Amsterdam Economics reconfirmed the axiom that a 10% increase in air connectivity yields 0.5% higher GDP per capita and a +1.6% in employment. That increase is also associated with improvements in social indicators linked to the UN Sustainable Development goals. Every single study for the past 20 years has found this relationship.

There is a common belief that the growth of the hub will stunt regional airports' growth and possibly harm national connectivity. This is not supported by evidence.

Recent research¹ conducted for the European Commission's Competition Directorate, clearly demonstrates that traffic growth at a hub happens at the same time as traffic growth at regional airports. Beyond a 200-kilometres radius, or 120-minute drive time, airport traffic development is complementary.

Increasing the passenger cap will have positive catalytic impacts across the Irish economy which will support connectivity development at all airports. Hub growth and regional airport growth happens at the same time, even when those airports are not connected.

Nor is it surprising that the capital city airport handles a large share of a nation's traffic. Dublin Airport handles just under 70% of Ireland's total air passenger traffic (island of Ireland, including Northern Ireland). This share is on par with the traffic concentration at capital hubs as shown by ACI EUROPE's airport passenger data. Prague Airport accounts for 92% of Czechia's traffic, Copenhagen for 90% of Denmark's traffic, Vienna 89% of Austria's traffic, and others have similar shares.

These hubs drive national economies through connectivity, tourism, and foreign direct investment, precisely the successful model that Dublin Airport has developed.

2. Amplify Ireland's air connectivity

Dublin Airport's business model also shows the presence of a successful hub operation, especially for a country with a small population. Hub airports depend not just on economies of scale but also economies of scope, bringing together point-to-point traffic with connecting traffic. Dublin Airport is a top 20 hub, measured by the SEO NetScan Hub Connectivity Index. In 2025, it was ranked 18th, down from its 17th spot in 2019. Meanwhile airports like Athens have seen their ranking change by +10, Copenhagen +5, Gatwick +4, and Milan-Malpensa +7.

To be sure, Dublin Airport has done well. But with the capacity cap just now constraining activity, the signals are that hub connectivity is at risk. Dublin Airport has gone from being one of the fastest growing airports offering hub connectivity since 2014, to only 9th place since 2023.

¹ [Evaluation Support Study for the Revision of the Guidelines on State Aid to Airports and Airlines](#) (March 2026, European Commission Directorate General for Competition).



*SEO Airport Connectivity – Hub Connectivity Index, rank for airports with >1000 Hub Index in 2025, change versus base year.

The logic of economies of scope cuts both ways: an airport can rapidly grow its hub Connectivity, but if it cannot offer conditions for hub expansion, then it may also experience rapid retrenchment as airlines build their transfer waves elsewhere.

Capacity caps can have severe consequences for the connectivity that is offered. Paris-Orly which has a firm aircraft movement cap has seen its Hub Connectivity score collapse, falling 43% from 2019 to 2025, as Air France consolidated its hub operations at CDG and point-to-point airlines replaced the slots.

3. Serve travelling public

Thinking about travellers, capacity caps also impact air fares. Congested, capacity-constrained airports tend to have higher air fares.² If the passenger cap is not lifted, passengers will not only suffer from fewer flight choices, but also from higher air fares because demand exceeds supply. It creates a self-tightening ratchet which becomes harder to undo the longer it persists, so should be avoided in the first place. This also undoubtedly impacts the competitiveness of the local and national economy.

Support Ireland’s integration

At the European level, Mario Draghi’s report on European Competitiveness has put transport and aviation back on the agenda. Air connectivity is a critical contributor to competitiveness, which needs to be enhanced and protected, particularly for island countries like Ireland.

But if we look at our European aviation policies over the past 10 years, the focus has almost exclusively been on its negative externalities, and in ways that are now compromising the positive externalities.

² A long list of academic studies could be cited here, the most useful is the *Independent Peer Review of Recent Research on the Existence of Scarcity Rents at Heathrow* by University of Leeds (August 2019) for the UK CAA.

This is in sharp contrast to what has happened in the rest of the world, where aviation and air connectivity are a key part of economic development policies and competitiveness strategies. To the west, New York's JFK is rebuilding itself with two new terminals, and to the East, the UK is expanding its London airports, Poland is building a new hub. Further afield Dubai is expanding Al Maktoum into a passenger airport, with growth plans shape future aviation centrality, and India and China are expanding airports and capacity at an astonishing rate.

It is good that we can sit down in this room together and engage to discuss the importance of the social good created by European airports. Ensuring that airports can reach their full contribution is critical. ACI EUROPE urges you to allow Dublin Airport to serve its community by passing the bill to remove the passenger cap.

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