

**ACI EUROPE Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport on the
Dublin Airport (Passenger Cap) Bill 2026
27 February, 2026**

ACI EUROPE strongly supports the Dublin Airport (Passenger Cap) Bill 2026, which seeks to empower the Minister for Transport to revoke or amend the 32 million annual passenger cap imposed in 2007 as a planning condition. This cap artificially constrains growth at DUB, limiting Ireland's even greater socio-economic potential through enhanced connectivity.

Direct air connectivity drives trade, productivity, investment, tourism, and employment, as shown in ACI EUROPE's recent study by SEO Amsterdam Economics¹. Every 10% increase yields 0.5% higher GDP per capita and 1.6% more jobs, alongside social gains including 14% lower poverty rates, 9% better education access, 5% more R&D investment, 19% progress in gender equality, and 1.2% higher life satisfaction.

As the representative body for Europe's airports, ACI EUROPE emphasises that traffic development at gateway airports is the European and global norm and the optimal way to deliver positive connectivity outcomes for travellers.

Dublin's strategic role as an Irish and European hub

In 2025, Dublin Airport handled a record 36.4 million passengers (+5.1% vs. 2024) marking its busiest year ever, underscoring strong demand and significant untapped growth potential, despite robust growth at Shannon (+9%), Cork (+13%), and record growth at Knock (+13.5%) and Kerry airports. The latest airport even marking its busiest year ever, notably thanks to the domestic route linking Kerry to Dublin.

It clearly demonstrates surging demand for air connectivity across Ireland and the critical need to expand capacity at Dublin Airport, while supporting growth at Shannon, Cork, and Knock airports, to accommodate more passengers, thereby extending socioeconomic benefits to regions beyond Dublin.

Dublin airport handles ~69% of Ireland's total air passenger traffic (island of Ireland, including Northern Ireland). Traffic concentration at capital hubs is standard across Europe: London Heathrow handles ~84 million passengers (~50% of UK air passenger traffic), Paris-CDG ~80 million (~65% of France's air passenger traffic), and Amsterdam Schiphol ~70 million (~88% of Dutch passenger air traffic). These hubs drive national economies through connectivity, tourism, and foreign direct investment, precisely the successful model that Dublin Airport has developed.

Dublin Airport also plays a critical role in the European and North Atlantic aviation network as Ireland's primary international gateway, uniquely equipped with US Preclearance facilities that enable seamless transatlantic connections. In 2025, Dublin Airport handled over 2 million transatlantic passengers via preclearance, exceeding this milestone for the first time, with ~190 weekly flights to 11 US cities, underscoring its key position bridging Europe and North America amid +46% total traffic growth since 2015.

¹ [ACI EUROPE Synopsis of SEO Amsterdam Economics study – Benefits of Airports and Air Connectivity](#)

The cap's removal aligns with daa's €2 billion infrastructure investment plan to future-proof Dublin Airport for sustainable, long-term expansion needs.

Economic impact of airport capacity expansion

The economic significance of Dublin Airport to the Irish economy cannot be understated. Recent research from SEO Amsterdam Economics (*The Economic and Social Impact of European Airports and Air Connectivity, 2024*) for ACI EUROPE has reconfirmed the evidence of a strongly positive relationship between air connectivity growth and increases in well-being, including GDP per capita as well as social outcomes. A 10% increase in air connectivity is linked to an increase in GDP per capita by 0.5%.

Further research (Pot & Koster, 2022) showed that economic benefits from air connectivity increases are strong at large airports. This is because of the strong positive spillover effects beyond the catchment area, which benefit a wider area beyond the airport's immediate region.

Distortion of Ireland's aviation network due to DUB Passenger Cap

The 32 million passenger cap severely distorts Ireland's aviation network and stifles slot expansion at Ireland's primary gateway despite surging demand (+5.1% to 36.4M in 2025), while capping national connectivity benefits, a particularly detrimental course for an island nation.

Conclusion

Against the backdrop of the challenges posed by increased geopolitical instability, the recent Draghi and Letta reports highlighted the importance of European action to protect competitiveness. Air connectivity to markets is a critical component of this which needs to be enhanced and protected, particularly for small open economies like Ireland. In this context, ACI EUROPE urges the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport to swiftly endorse the Dublin Airport (Passenger Cap) Bill 2026. Revoking this outdated 32 million cap will unleash Dublin Airport's growth potential, amplify Ireland's air connectivity, and unlock broader socioeconomic benefits for the country.

We thank the Committee for this opportunity to comment and for considering ACI EUROPE's views on this topic of strategic importance for European aviation. We remain at the Committee's disposal to provide any additional information that may assist in its deliberations.
