

CIVIL AVIATION

A Scottish Plan

REGIONAL ORGANISATION OF AIR TRANSPORT.

A PLEA FOR PRESTWICK

THE Scottish regional plan for commercial aviation which is now engaging the attention of all Scottish planning agencies and local authorities, and for which the vigorous support of all Scottish Members of Parliament has been pledged, is described in a survey published under the title "North Atlantic."

The project is not concerned merely with airports. It proposes the enlargement of British commercial aviation by the creation of operating organisations on a regional basis, and advocates:—

- (1) Overseas and internal airlines based on Prestwick and operated by a company native to Scotland.
- (2) The development of Prestwick Airport as first alternative to Heathrow, the London terminal, and as a junction for the various services through the northern hemisphere operated by Britain and other nations.
- (3) The creation of a commercial aircraft manufacturing industry affiliated for design experience to the Prestwick commercial airlines.

In order to seize the opportunities of the next ten years which Britain has by virtue of being the centre of a hemisphere containing more than 90 per cent. of the world's population, more than 90 per cent. of the world's industrial activity, and therefore more than 90 per cent. of potential air traffic, the survey says that Britain must revise its judgment on the following points:—

"The first concerns costs. Prior to 1939 overseas air transport lived on subsidy and political protection. It will not be so when this war ends. It is stating only half the truth to say that air transport costs are diminishing or that they have reached an economic level. At the present stage it is possible to offer passenger fares below the cost of first-class rail and shipping fares. Within five years of the war's end air rates will be comparable with third-class surface fares. Within ten years they may have dropped below them.

"The second concerns the nature of commercial air transport operations. Before the war British overseas air services were designed principally to supplement Commonwealth communications. Therefore the old Imperial Airways routes ran mainly to the south and south-east through territories that were primitive in their economy. The routes of prime importance to commercial operators are nearly all in the northern hemisphere, for commercial airlines have to seek traffic in volume. In other words, their object must be to provide service to the greatest possible number of people, leaving the question of Commonwealth communications to the Government or the instrument which the Government created.

The third point concerns Britain's place in the scheme of things. "British air transport will flourish only so long as freedom of the air means freedom to apply the energy, experience and imagination of aviation companies, in aviation for aviation's sake."

Against the "Chosen Instrument"

"Already there is visible the greatest of all the disadvantages of the 'single chosen instrument' policy—the survey says—that is the monopoly of operation experience granted to British Overseas Airways and resulting in a dearth of potential airline operators in Great Britain. The applicants for comprehensive rights on foreign and domestic routes consist not of aviation companies ready and willing to face world competition on any terms, but of shipowners and the railway companies, plus one out-and-out aviation company based on Prestwick. It is too late to attempt the segregation of transport industries on the American plan, so that British commercial aviation might grow to full stature under the most favourable conditions. But practical means are at hand to ensure that in one area, at least, commercial air transport will be subject to the leadership and standards set by operators concerned only with aviation and who can therefore be trusted to develop air transport interests without regard for other considerations."

Coming down to earth, the survey says that Prestwick, with its unexampled weather record, is the ideal base for a regional

airline plan to be integrated within a general British one.

Prestwick—it is said—has been for four years all that London hopes to make of Heathrow and New York of Idlewild. It is also capable of infinite expansion as a base for flying boats, no matter what size, for its seaway is the Firth of Clyde.

Incidentally, early in 1943 the present Board of Scottish Aviation gave notice of intention to transfer to communal ownership their holding in the airport, either by conversion of the airport undertaking to a public utility corporation or as the Government might advise. This transfer, the survey states, awaits the conclusion of present negotiations between Scottish M.P.s, the Secretary for Scotland, the Minister of Civil Aviation and the Secretary of State for Air.

The airline plan based on Prestwick and advocated by the survey consists of:—

(1) Night Service to and from New York for sleeper passengers and first-class mail and freight.

One stop will be made at Goose Bay (Labrador) or Gander (Newfoundland) or other alternative airports. Aircraft will each have sleeping accommodation for twenty passengers and will carry 2,200 lb. of mail and freight. Passengers leaving Prestwick at 10 p.m. will reach New York in time for breakfast.

(2) Day Service to and from Canada and the United States (via Iceland and Goose Bay) for passengers and second-class mail and freight. Direct connection between Prestwick and the European airline services at Paris, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Oslo and Stockholm.

A Global Service

The day service on the Northern route provides for three stops *en route* at Iceland, Greenland and Goose Bay or Gander. It will connect with the Canadian and U.S. internal airline networks, thus facilitating rapid transit to any destination in North America. Aircraft will each accommodate 40 passengers in addition to 6,000 lb. of mail and cargo. The relatively short stages on this route make it possible to offer attractive rates for many varieties of freight, and in respect of all Atlantic services Scottish Aviation have offered to undertake postal contracts without subsidy.

The Continental shuttles are to connect with the airline services of Europe at Paris, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Oslo, and Stockholm. They will consist of 20-seat passenger aircraft and a fleet of aerial freighters. In this case also provision will be made from the beginning for the handling of traffic in volume and at rates likely to attract exporters and importers.

A global route will be projected around the Northern hemisphere as equipment becomes available and operational experience is obtained on the Atlantic services. It will consist of a main line serving Oslo, Stockholm, Leningrad, Moscow, Omsk, Peking, Vladivostok, Fairbanks (Alaska), Vancouver and Chicago, and two Southern loops joining the main line at Vladivostok. The loops provide services for (a) Hamburg, Berlin, Odessa, Baku, Teheran, Karachi, and (b) Amsterdam, Vienna, Belgrade, Istanbul, Cairo, Karachi, Calcutta, Hong Kong (with, ultimately, a shuttle to Tokio), Peking and Vladivostok.

The Atlantic, European and internal services will be the first to be established after Government sanction has been obtained.

Scottish Aviation have satisfied themselves that attractive fares can be offered without subsidy. Initial fare tables provide for service to New York for £80 return.

For the purposes of Scottish planning, conversion of American aircraft to passenger requirement has been chosen "as the most timely, effective, and economic means of getting air commerce into the air and of ensuring the continuity of Scottish aircraft manufacture." The survey admits that there are objections to such a course, but it says that there is no alternative, as "British aviation industry is largely without experience in the design and manufacture of commercial air carriers; the preliminary work required for getting out commercial types will occupy many months, possibly one or

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