



MEDIA RELEASE

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Mid West Mayors And Cathaoirligh Unite In Opposition To Aer Lingus Cost Cutting Plans

- Aer Lingus accused of giving preferential treatment to Dublin Airport

The Mayors and Cathaoirligh in the Mid-West Region today said that Aer Lingus' survival plan might be the death knell of Shannon Airport and the Mid West Region's industry and tourism sectors if it is implemented in its current form.

Meeting today in Ennis, Co Clare, the Mayors of Clare and Limerick City, and the Cathaoirligh of North Tipperary County Council, Limerick County Council and the Mid West Regional Authority outlined their opposition to plans by the airline to reduce transatlantic services and remove the company's US base at Shannon Airport with the loss of 102 cabin crew jobs.

Speaking following the symbolic meeting, Leo Walsh, Limerick County Councillor and Cathaoirleach of the Mid West Regional Authority said thousands of jobs, the economic viability of the Mid West Region and the sustainability of entire communities depended on the retention of existing transatlantic services and jobs at Shannon Airport.

He continued: "The transatlantic services currently operated by Aer Lingus at Shannon are critically and strategically important to maintain existing development in the Mid West's industry and tourism sectors and to position the wider region for further growth and investment into the future. The airline's proposed ending of the direct Shannon-New York route early in 2010 will have disastrous, far-reaching consequences for the local economy should it take place."

Stressing the importance of the transatlantic hub at Shannon for, not only the Mid-West region, but the entire West of Ireland, Cllr. Walsh noted: "Significant progress has been made by the Mid West's local and regional authorities in improving infrastructure, particularly along the Atlantic Corridor and on other major road projects throughout the wider region. Improvements are also underway in relation to rail connectivity, broadband provision and other elements that are critical for progressive economic development. The provision of a highly skilled workforce through the presence of the numerous Third Level Institutions in the region has also added value to the strong multinational sector. Underpinning all such development and future growth is proper access to the US market."

Meanwhile, the Mayors and Cathaoirigh accused Aer Lingus of giving preferential treatment to Dublin Airport in relation to the operation of its transatlantic services.

According to Cllr. Walsh: "It is clear that there is an ulterior motive behind Aer Lingus' decision not to utilise the new United States custom and immigration pre-clearance facility in Shannon Airport for its transatlantic services until the middle of 2010. The airline's confirmation that it will not be in a position to use this facility until such time as the Dublin facility is also in operation is a slight on Shannon Airport and the entire Mid West Region. The bottom line is that we feel that the company's proposal to end the direct Shannon-New York route early in 2010 is geared towards its apparent end strategy of providing all of its transatlantic services out of Dublin."

"Despite stating that it will not be making any announcement regarding its operations at Shannon in the immediate future, the Mid West's local and regional authorities now call on Aer Lingus management to immediately clarify their future intentions regarding the Airport. As a region that helped establish and nurture the airline, we are entitled to be informed of any plans that the airline may have. We also call on the Minister of Transport, Mr. Noel Dempsey, to intervene in the interests of ensuring the viability and vitality of business and tourism interests in the Mid-West region consistent with the Government's policy of promoting Balanced Regional Development, as stated in the National Spatial Strategy", concluded Cllr. Walsh.

The Mayors and Cathaoirigh, meanwhile, confirmed they would be seeking an urgent meeting with the Minister for Transport and all T.D.s in the Mid West to address the serious concerns raised at today's meeting.

Present at today's meeting, convened by the Cathaoirleach of the Mid-West Regional Authority, Cllr. Leo Walsh, were the Mayor of Clare, Cllr. Tony Mulcahy, Mayor of Limerick City, Cllr. Kevin Kiely, Leas Cathaoirleach of Limerick County, Cllr. Bill O'Donnell and Mayor of North Tipperary, Cllr. Denis Ryan.

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Cllr. William O'Donnell, Leas Cathaoirleach of Limerick County Council; Cllr. Tony Mulcahy, Mayor of Clare; Cllr. Denis Ryan, Mayor of North Tipperary; Cllr. Leo Walsh, Cathaoirleach of the Mid-West Regional Authority; Cllr. Kevin Kiely, Mayor of Limerick City; and Liam Conneally, Director of the Mid-West Regional Authority