

Transcript: Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the Dublin Airport (Passenger Capacity) Bill 2026

Session date: 25 March 2026 Type: Industry witnesses Committee: Joint Committee on Transport, Tourism and Sport Chair: Senator Michael Murphy

Witnesses

- Aer Lingus: Lynne Embleton (LE), CEO; Donal Moriarty (DM), Chief Corporate Affairs Officer
- ACI Europe: Michael Stanton-Geddes (MSG), Director of Economics and Competition; Morgan Foulkes (MF), Deputy Director General (online)
- Airlines for America: Chris Sununu (CS), President and CEO; Keith Glatz (KG), Senior Vice President, International Affairs
- IATA: Willie Walsh (WW), Director General
- Ryanair: Eddie Wilson (EW), CEO, Ryanair DAC; Jason McGuinness, Chief Commercial Officer

Apologies: Michael O'Leary (bereavement)

Speaker Key

- CHAIR = Senator Michael Murphy
 - LE = Lynne Embleton, CEO, Aer Lingus
 - DM = Donal Moriarty, Aer Lingus
 - MSG = Michael Stanton-Geddes, ACI Europe
 - MF = Morgan Foulkes, ACI Europe (online)
 - CS = Chris Sununu, Airlines for America
 - KG = Keith Glatz, Airlines for America
 - WW = Willie Walsh, IATA
 - EW = Eddie Wilson, Ryanair
 - CL = Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee
 - GB = Deputy Grace Boland
 - ROG = Deputy Roderic O'Gorman
 - CC = Deputy Cathal Crowe
 - DOR = Deputy Darren O'Rourke
 - GT = Deputy Gillian Toole
 - SPEAKER_12 = Senator Nessa Cosgrove (unconfirmed)
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Opening by Chair

1. CHAIR: Good morning, all. Okay, confirming that we are now in public session. Just to confirm that Deputy Ann Graves will substitute for Deputy Pa Daly and also Deputy Darren O'Rourke has notified me that Deputy Louise O'Reilly will substitute for him. No apologies have been brought to my attention.
2. CHAIR: The purpose of today's meeting is once again to continue our pre-legislative scrutiny of the cap at Dublin Airport passenger capacity bill 2026. The proposed bill is a significant intervention. It would empower the Minister to amend or revoke a planning condition that has capped passenger numbers at Dublin Airport and would prevent such a cap being imposed by a planning condition in the future. This is a major shift from the existing planning framework and from local decision-making towards central government. We do acknowledge that Dublin Airport is the state's principal international gateway. Ireland is a small, open island economy and aviation is undeniably important for tourism, for trade, inward investment, jobs and indeed international connectivity.

3. CHAIR: Today we'll hear from airline and airport interests. Delighted to welcome today on behalf of the committee from Aer Lingus, first of all, Ms Lynne Embleton, Chief Executive Officer, Mr Donal Moriarty, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer. From the Airports Council International Europe, Mr Michael Stanton-Geddes, Director of Economics and Competition. And joining us online is the Deputy Director, Mr Morgan Foulkes. From Airlines for America, Mr Chris Sununu, President and CEO, and Mr Keith Glatz, Senior Vice President, International Affairs. From International Air Transport Association, Mr Willie Walsh, Director General. And from Ryanair, Mr Eddie Wilson, Ryanair DAC CEO, and Mr Jason McGuinness, Chief Commercial Officer. And I do want to acknowledge the apologies that we have formally received from Mr Michael O'Leary, bereavement, and we offer our condolences.
4. CHAIR: Just some notes on privilege. Witnesses are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that you should not criticize or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable or otherwise engage in speech that might be regarded as damaging to the good name of the person or entity. Therefore, if your statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, you will be directed to discontinue your remarks. It is imperative that you comply with any such direction. Finally, for members, once again you are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that you should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the houses or an official, either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.
5. CHAIR: I now call on the witnesses in the following order to make their statements. We'll first of all begin with Aer Lingus, followed by Airports Council International Europe, Airlines for America, International Air Transport Association and last but not least, Ryanair. So I'll now invite Ms Embleton to make her opening statement on behalf of Aer Lingus. Kind of five minutes, if that's okay, if we can keep the opening statements to five minutes, please. Thank you.

Opening Statement: Aer Lingus (Lynne Embleton)

6. LE: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you. So Chair, members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today. As you've already said, aviation is uniquely critical to Ireland as a small, open island economy. Dublin Airport is not just a transport facility, it's a strategic national infrastructure. It underpins Ireland's international connectivity, its tourism, its trade and foreign direct investment. And it supports employment across every region of the country and is a key enabler of the Irish economy. Aer Lingus alone carried about 11 million of the 36.4 million passengers who passed through Dublin Airport last year. We employ almost 6,000 people, the majority based at Dublin, and we operate long-haul and short-haul under UK network. Importantly, Dublin Airport functions as a hub airport, so it connects Ireland, the UK and Europe with North America, and this is fully aligned with the objectives of the national aviation policy.
7. LE: Against that backdrop, the existing passenger cap is a historical anachronism that needs to be urgently removed. If the passenger cap were enforced, it would require a reduction of approximately 4.4 million passengers through Dublin Airport. That's over 12% of the current traffic. And that would have a catastrophic impact on connectivity, on the airport and on the wider Irish economy. Now, the general scheme rightly recognises this. It acknowledges that any enforcement of the cap would cause serious economic harm and that legislative intervention is justified in the public interest.
8. LE: Aer Lingus commissioned independent economic analysis which concluded that if the passenger cap were to be enforced and result in a reduction of passenger numbers, for every 1 million passengers lost due to the cap, that would equate to approximately 1.4 billion euro in lost direct, indirect and induced expenditure, over 320 million euro in lost exchequer revenues and up to 37,000 lost jobs. Now, these aren't abstract figures. They reflect potential lost jobs, lost routes, reduced connectivity, constrained tourism, foregone investment, and reduced competitiveness relative to peer economies.
9. LE: Passenger numbers at Dublin Airport were 36.4 million in 2025, so it will be apparent to the Committee that if a reduction of 4.6 million passengers were to be required due to the passenger

cap, the effect on the Irish economy would be catastrophic. Enforcement of the cap would also impact supply-demand economics, and that would cause an increase in airfares.

10. LE: Now the timing is absolutely critical. So while this general scheme provides the Minister with the power to revoke or amend the planning condition, that power only takes effect once the legislation is enacted and commenced and a ministerial order is actually issued. And any delay materially risks the enforcement of capacity reductions. And this risk is particularly acute in respect of summer 2027.
11. LE: So to date, severe cuts on seat capacity at Dublin by the Irish Aviation Authority, the IAA, have been avoided, but only because of legal proceedings initiated by the airlines and the resulting stay imposed by the High Court, pending the outcome of proceedings before the Court of Justice of the European Union. A judgment is expected from that court within months, and therefore the duration of the current stay is uncertain.
12. LE: If the stay were to be lifted and the passenger cap remains in place when the IAA makes its next capacity declaration for summer 2027, and that declaration is due in early October of this year, then there's a real risk of very significant capacity cuts for summer 2027. Planning decisions by Fingal County Council that relate to the DAA's infrastructure application, which includes an application to raise the passenger cap, will not be concluded in time to prevent that outcome.
13. LE: We therefore strongly emphasise to the Committee the importance of early enactment and commencement, the urgent completion of any required environmental assessment and the inclusion of clear specified timelines throughout the process so that the Minister can make the required order as quickly as possible and in advance of the IAA's decision regarding the declaration of capacity for summer 2027, which as I say is due in October.
14. LE: Swift enactment, decisive use of the powers in the Bill will provide certainty and stability. In conclusion, the need to address the passenger cap at Dublin Airport is widely recognised. The general scheme provides a solution to it, but its effectiveness depends entirely on timing. Speed and certainty are essential to safeguard Ireland's international connectivity, economic strength and resilience and long-term competitiveness. Thank you.
15. CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Embleton. I now invite Mr Stanton-Geddes to make his opening statement on behalf of Airports Council International Europe. Five minutes.

Opening Statement: ACI Europe (Michael Stanton-Geddes)

16. MSG: Good morning. Thank you, Chair. Thank you, members. We thank the Committee for this opportunity to share the views of ACI Europe regarding the passenger capacity of Dublin Airport. Airports Council International Europe is the trade association based in Brussels representing the interests of 600 airports in 55 countries facilitating 95% of commercial traffic in Europe.
17. MSG: This morning I provide a perspective based on work with airports across the European landscape and personally more than 20 years in aviation analysis. ACI Europe urges the committee to swiftly endorse the bill under consideration 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 that it can be done in a way that correctly considers the people and the communities around the airport.
18. MSG: Abundant evidence has already been provided to the committee about the link between aviation and economic growth. For now, all that I will add is that every serious study in the past 20 years has reaffirmed broadly the axiom that increasing air connectivity, however you measure that, increases wealth, GDP, and other economic productivity measures.
19. MSG: There is a misconception, however, that this growth is not equal across regions. It's a common belief that the growth of a hub could stunt regional airports' growth, and that's not right. There's been very recent research published by the European Commission's Competition Directorate, which clearly demonstrates that when you have a certain distance between airports, between 150 to 200 kilometers, growth at the hub happens at the same time as traffic growth at

regional airports. So increasing the passenger cap at Dublin will have positive catalytic impacts across the Irish economy, which will support connectivity developments at all airports.

20. MSG: Secondly, as we heard, Dublin Airport's business model shows the presence of a successful hub operation in close partnership with its airline. Hub airports depend not just on economies of scale, but also on economies of scope, bringing together point to point and connecting traffic. One measurement is the Netscan hub connectivity index. Dublin performs well for an airport in a small country. It ranked 18th in Europe in 2025, but that's down from its 17th position in 2019. So Dublin lost one spot in the hub connectivity ranking. Meanwhile, airports like Athens have seen their ranking jump plus 10 positions, Copenhagen plus 5, Gatwick plus 4, and Milan-Malpensa plus 7.
21. MSG: To be sure, Dublin Airport has done well, but the capacity cap is just now constraining activity. And there are signals that this hub connectivity is at risk. When we look at the rate of increase, so the percent change of hub connectivity, Dublin was the second fastest growing hub between 2019 and 2025, and now it has fallen to the ninth fastest growing hub between 2023 and 2025. So that is a cause for concern.
22. MSG: This is a real concern. Capacity caps can have serious consequences if it pushes airlines to build their transfer waves elsewhere. Paris Orly Airport, which has a firm capacity movement cap, has seen its hub connectivity score collapse, falling 43% between 2019 to 2025 as Air France consolidated its hub operations at Charles de Gaulle Airport.
23. MSG: Stepping back at the European level, the report on European competitiveness by Mario Draghi made it clear that transport and aviation are enablers of competitiveness of industrial and societal integration. If we look at the past 10 years of aviation policy across Europe and the EU and member states, the focus has been exclusively on negative externalities. And it has been done in a way that is compromising our positive benefits.
24. MSG: This is in sharp contrast to what is happening in the rest of the world. To the west, New York's JFK airport is rebuilding itself entirely with two massive new terminals. To the east, the UK is expanding its London airports. Poland is building a new Port Polska hub. There's expansion across the map and further afield. Dubai is expanding Al Maktoum into a massive passenger airport with plans to shape future aviation centrality. And in India and China, airports are popping up like mushrooms after the rain.
25. MSG: So it's good we can sit down in this room together and engage and discuss about the social good created by European airports. Based on what we see across Europe, we urge you to allow Dublin Airport to serve its community by passing the bill to remove the passenger cap. Thank you very much, Chair.
26. CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Stanton-Geddes. Could I now invite Mr Sununu to make his opening statement on behalf of Airlines for America.

Opening Statement: Airlines for America (Chris Sununu)

27. CS: Good morning. Well, thank you very much for the opportunity to be here. So let me be clear at the outset. The passenger cap at Dublin Airport, it's no longer a planning constraint. It's a policy decision that, if left in place, would be an economic disaster for the citizens of Ireland. It must be removed. And we're not talking about 2027. We're not talking about later this fall. It has to be removed immediately.
28. CS: Dublin is Ireland's primary international gateway, a critical link between the United States and Europe. And as an island, air connectivity, it's critical to every aspect of your economy. That connection underpins tourism, trade, all the foreign direct investment that's come in. Dublin Airport contributes approximately \$10 billion annually to the Irish economy, supports more than 100,000 jobs. Constraining that connectivity is no small matter. It carries national consequences. The math is very clear. Enforcing the passenger cap would cost the Irish economy somewhere between \$6 and \$10 billion in lost direct economic activity. That equates to more than half of your tourism spending here in Ireland.

29. CS: This isn't about just stopping flights at the airport. The cap stands to stop the growth of your economy. And it also raises a fundamental issue, which is alignment in Ireland's international commitments. Under the United States-EU Open Skies Agreement, both sides committed to a framework that allows airlines to compete freely without arbitrary limits on capacity. The passenger cap as currently applied, it violates that commitment. It was not designed and should not be applied as an aviation tool.
30. CS: The U.S. has over 160 bilateral air services agreements in place all over the world, and whenever there is a disparate treatment of that partnership, then retaliation and rebalancing can be expected. Airlines are making decisions now where to deploy aircraft, open routes, invest over the next several years. Those decisions depend on confidence in that market access. Where that confidence is lacking, aircraft moves, capital moves, growth moves, and those decisions are not easily reversed.
31. CS: This is why the timing matters. Court proceedings will take time. A temporary stay does not resolve the issue with any sort of certainty. Only your legislative action can do that. And today, the United States is watching very closely in terms of what your next steps will be. The issue is now before the United States government, and I'm not here to speak on the government's behalf, but we can be clear about how these situations are viewed. When market access for U.S. carriers appears constrained in ways that conflict with international agreements, it triggers a response.
32. CS: I was at the White House last week discussing this issue. I was at the U.S. Department of Transportation on Monday discussing this very issue, and I'm here today with all the craziness we have going on in the United States with aviation. Right here today, this currently is our priority, and this is where folks are watching.
33. CS: The government and airlines are going to be making decisions very soon based on the response or the non-response of this body. Not acting quickly introduces risk, not only for U.S. carriers operating in Ireland, but for Irish carriers' access to the United States. Routes, frequencies, future growth, all dependent on policy decisions made here.
34. CS: The passenger cap is a direct threat to one of the world's best partnerships. It's in everyone's interest to see that the U.S.-Ireland relationship grow. The good news is this. In fact, I think it's great news is that the body has the opportunity today to send a clear signal that Dublin remains open to growth, investment, and competition, a clear message to your citizens that you prioritize their jobs, their economic success, all of that triggers and that opportunity that triggers for their families, and a clear message to the U.S. government that you respect and value our longstanding agreement specifically as it pertains to airlines and the U.S. Open Skies agreements. The field is very much set for your success, and we hope that you'll take the win. Thank you very much.
35. CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Sununu. I now invite Mr Walsh to make his opening statement on behalf of IATA.

Opening Statement: IATA (Willie Walsh)

36. WW: Thank you to the members of the committee for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the International Air Transport Association. IATA represents over 360 airlines that carry some 85% of the world's air traffic and the majority of airlines operating at Dublin Airport. As you've heard, Ireland's aviation sector is not simply an important industry, it's a strategic national asset. Air connectivity underpins Ireland's role as a global, outward-looking economy. It enables trade, tourism, foreign direct investment and supports the country's integration into international business, technology and innovation networks. Dublin Airport is the state's primary international gateway and the country's hub. When its capacity is constrained, Ireland's international connectivity, competitiveness and economic growth are constrained with it.
37. WW: In Ireland, aviation contributes more than US\$20 billion to Ireland's GDP and supports approximately 128,000 jobs, with air-enabled tourism generating a further US\$22 billion. These

benefits depend on airlines being able to grow where demand exists. The long-standing passenger cap at Dublin Airport now poses a real and immediate risk. It restricts route development, limits consumer choice and undermines Ireland's attractiveness for investment and tourism. Uncertainty around capacity means airlines are already evaluating alternative airports, and to be clear, those airports are not in Ireland, evaluating alternative airports for future growth, decisions that may become permanent.

38. WW: The bill is therefore both necessary and urgent. It replaces an outdated planning condition with a modern transparent mechanism that enables the minister to act when the cap is causing economic or connectivity harm. That harm is happening today and will continue to impact Ireland's competitiveness if not resolved quickly.
39. WW: Timing is critical to remove the current uncertainty. Airlines have already begun planning for the summer of 2027. They will make decisions this September, with Dublin Airport's capacity declaration due by 1 October. If certainty is not restored before then, airlines will be forced to plan on the assumption that the cap remains. Once capacity assumptions are embedded through the capacity declaration and slot allocation processes, they become difficult, if not impossible, to unwind. Once airlines, aircraft, crews and schedules are allocated to other routes, decisions are unlikely to be reversed. Ireland risks losing connectivity that may not return.
40. WW: We fully understand that environmental compliance is required. However, the reality is that extended sequencing of processes, consultations and information requests can push timelines far beyond what the industry's global scheduling system can accommodate. Prolonged uncertainty would itself cause significant harm.
41. WW: The Bill gives government the tools it needs. What matters now is using them quickly and decisively. Swift enactment and commencement are essential to protect Ireland's connectivity and economic resilience. IATA strongly supports urgent passage of this legislation. The risks of delay are significant and avoidable. Ireland needs a functioning framework that reflects the reality of global aviation and protects its role in international air transport. Thank you and I look forward to your questions.
42. CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Walsh. I now invite Mr Wilson to make his opening statement on behalf of Ryanair.

Opening Statement: Ryanair (Eddie Wilson)

43. EW: Thank you. Ryanair is the largest airline in the world for international passengers, the largest airline in Europe, and by no surprise it is the largest airline in Dublin. Giving a sense of what the growth is going to be like, we have a fleet in excess of 640 aircraft today. We're going to take a delivery of 300 aircraft over the next seven years. And the question is, where are they going to go? And with the cap as it is at the moment and that uncertainty, you know, those aircraft can't be allocated to Dublin, but they're coming to Europe or indeed North Africa.
44. EW: The government, the program for government when they came to power over 16 months ago was to remove this unlawful cap and nothing has happened. I think it's also pertinent that even though the noise issue which was addressed here yesterday with the committee, that it is, even though it's not part of the cap, I think it would be remiss of me not to address that.
45. EW: Dublin Airport has been there since 1940. Local issues can take over from national growth of a strategic asset. And on the noise surveys that we have taken from some of those areas across Dublin, they are still in North Dublin. They're in places like St Margaret's, Ballyboughal, Ashbourne. Even with jets overhead, they're just marginally over 50 decibels, which is well within the safe zone.
46. EW: Dublin passenger cap, it's over planning issues. Those planning issues back in 2007 have been addressed with the road network and the bus connectivity. The second runway was put in place in 2016. That gives us the ability to get 50, 60 million passengers at least. So this cap sits there at 32 million. We're planning now. Everybody is saying that here today. It's contrary to the U.S. Open Skies Agreement.

47. EW: But Dublin can and must grow. I mean, it's not a question of does aircraft, will they go to other parts of Ireland? Airlines, or airports right across Europe are putting in, not just across the world, but in Europe, are building capacity. Rome is set to grow to 100 million passengers. AENA in Spain are going to grow. Madrid and Barcelona, huge hubs. London Stansted is now set to grow to 52 million passengers. Gatwick has got these strategic initiatives that are not subject to local planning conditions at all and we need to learn a lesson from that.
48. EW: Ryanair has a national plan to grow our passenger numbers here from 23 million to 35 million, and close to 50, over 50 of that would come to Dublin but the rest, the balance of that, would go to regional airports where we have grown spectacularly post-COVID, we've almost doubled traffic in both Shannon and Cork since COVID. So we've got the aircraft, we've got the people, we can create up to 10,000 jobs on site at Dublin. But that's all dependent on this cap being abolished. And as we just heard there, it needs to be done now. We're planning. Those aircraft are going to be allocated elsewhere. We have all the implications for intercontinental travel and connectivity to this country. So the government has failed to deliver on its promises. It needs to do it now. It's of national importance. We are making those decisions. I've got 96 places where I can allocate aircraft right across Europe and North Africa, and we make those decisions now. And we need this cap scrapped immediately. And we're welcome to take any questions. Thank you.
49. CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Wilson, and I thank all the witnesses for their opening statements and indeed detailed submissions that were made in advance of these hearings. I think it's safe to say that all our witnesses are closely aligned in terms of perhaps some differences in emphasis and tone, but all call for swift legislative action to remove the cap and align with Irish law and international aviation obligations. We now move to questions. I propose to initially allocate eight minutes per member. If we have time for a follow-up, we will do a two or three-minute follow-up towards the end of today's meeting. So in terms of today's schedule, the first is Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee. And bearing in mind that we have five organisations, five witnesses in front of us, if you could direct your question to a particular witness, Senator Clifford-Lee.

Q&A Round 1

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee

50. CL: Thank you very much, Chairman, and thank you for coming before us today to discuss this really important matter. While I've just entered the committee room, I was following the conversation online, so thank you. I followed what you all said very closely.
51. CL: The first question I'd like to direct towards Aer Lingus and Ryanair, and it's specifically in relation to the residents around Dublin Airport. They've all expressed to me their support for connectivity, the support for the airport, but the good neighbour principle has not been adhered to. And particularly the flight path that has been undertaken by a number of airlines currently, areas and communities that never before were under a flight path are now currently under a flight path. And can you address this in a proper, meaningful way so that we can proceed ahead and develop the airport like we all want?
52. EW: Like, flight paths are set by AirNav, and those plans are set down as how aircraft can safely depart and arrive. But I've given you the details on, like, if you live beside an airport, if you don't like airplanes or you don't like, you know, you've got a choice whether you want to live beside an airport or not. I would put it to you that many of the...
53. CL: Sorry, I'm actually a member of this committee and I'm limited in time, so I want to put a question to you.
54. CL: People living near the airport have lived there for generations, long before Dublin Airport was there. And a bit of respect, and I'd like maybe if you could withdraw the accusation of nimbysism from the people living around Dublin Airport.
55. EW: No, I won't withdraw it at all, because it's actually accurate. Because what you have is that, if an airport, airplanes take off, right, when the pilot lines up on the runway, they've got a flight

plan, which is set down by AirNav and the flight corridors. It's not a question of you want to be a good neighbor or not. That's how you take off from an airport. The question then is, what are the noise implications of that? And the noise implications of that from surveys that we've done or completed are that when aircraft take off, that is well within the safe decibel level. And, you know, you've got to look at what's happened with aircraft. When I joined Ryanair over 29 years ago, the aircraft are actually 50% quieter.

56. CL: I'm not talking about the noise. What I'm talking about is that currently, aeroplanes across all airlines are not following the correct flight path. And now communities in Ballyboughal, Oldtown, Ashbourne and beyond Rolestown are suddenly finding they're under a flight path.
57. EW: Can I come in?
58. LE: Yeah, let me come in at this point. So, as you understand, for safety reasons, we have to follow the designated flight path. And Aer Lingus is 100% compliant with the standard instrument departure flight path. So if that flight path needs to change, that's a question for AirNav and the airport. But the airlines have to comply, and we 100% comply.
59. CL: Are you denying then that there are serious issues being suffered by communities?
60. LE: I'm simply saying it's the airline's responsibility to fly safely and to fly safely means we have to follow the flight path and that's what we do every time.
61. CL: Can you not find a different technical solution which would assist the many communities that have raised issues since the opening of the North Runway?
62. LE: So I know you've heard from the DAA and you've heard from the IAA. And it's their role to dictate the flight paths that the airlines follow. And it's our safety commitment to follow those flight paths.
63. CL: The planning permission that was granted for the North Runway is not being adhered to by airlines. And there's technical solutions.
64. LE: By air traffic control. And AirNav. We have to follow the standard instrument departures that we are given.
65. CL: So you're happy that your airline is adhering to the good neighbour principle?
66. LE: I'm happy that my airline is safe because we're following the designated take-off paths. If they change, we will follow the new designated take-off paths. It's not within the airline's power or the airline's discretion to take off in any direction we want.
67. CL: Are you happy that you're adhering to the good neighbour principle?
68. LE: I'm happy that we are operating safely. And we have to operate within a system. There are other players within the system, and I know they did come and talk to this committee. And I acknowledge that noise matters. I acknowledge that this is an issue for the community. But the solution doesn't sit with the airlines. The solution sits with the system that tells the airlines where and how to fly. And we will comply with that completely, but it's not within our power to change that.
69. CL: Could I ask the representative from Ryanair if you're happy that your airline is operating within the good neighbour principle?
70. EW: I don't know what the good neighbour principle is as it's laid down. What we do is that we have got slots that are allocated to us and it comes down at a micro level to an airline or an aircraft lines up for take-off and they don't have any discretion. They have those standard instrument departures...
71. CL: Clearly the aeroplanes are flying, since the North Runway opened in 2022, they're flying a different route that was not within the planning permission. It's clear. Look, thousands of people across...

72. EW: Senator, you have zero discretion to do that. You can say it three times if you like, but you cannot. You have no discretion. Willie here is a former pilot, and I'm sure he'll be able to tell you what the...
73. CL: Myself and many people here have met with the communities there that never before did they think that their houses would be under the flight path, that people who got planning permission from Fingal County Council did their due diligence, were aware of the planning permission for the North Runway. So there's clearly a disconnect happening there. So look, clearly I'm not going to get any satisfaction from you in relation to the good neighbour principle. We're talking about communities that support the airport and want the success of the airport, but it's not happening from your side. So I'll leave it there, Chairman.
74. CHAIR: Thank you.

Deputy Grace Boland

75. CHAIR: Deputy Grace Boland.
76. GB: I am supportive of lifting the airport cap, but obviously there are a number of local challenges and infrastructural challenges that do need to be addressed. Mr Walsh, can I ask you, do airlines have any input into these flight paths, into the SIDs?
77. WW: None at all? Generally no. Like, as a former airline pilot, just to reiterate what was said, you have at pretty much every airport a standard instrument departure for each of the runways that the airport uses, a standard arrival system as well. You've no discretion in terms of... The only time is in the event of a risk to safety when you can deviate from the plan, but you have no discretion.
78. GB: So airlines don't have any influence or input over the flight path. That is fully within the purview of DAA and AirNav. Yep.
79. GB: Is there any truth to the rumour that the planes taking off and taking a quick, sharp right turn over Fingal and Meath actually saves fuel and money?
80. WW: All airlines at Dublin Airport are compliant with the standard instrument departure. They have to follow that, so they have no discretion.
81. GB: But there is this notion out there, so I'm putting it to you in the appropriate forum to ask you the question, is there any truth?
82. WW: No, there's no truth. Airlines and pilots are required to follow the standard instrument departure.
83. GB: And then I assume, obviously, as airlines don't have any input or influence over the flight path, there would be no objection if DAA and AirNav changed the flight path?
84. WW: None whatsoever. That's the reality. And flight paths or standard instrument departures do change from time to time. They introduce new ones, they amend them. So it's not unusual. But these are published and then the airline is required to ensure that those flight paths are followed and pilots are required to ensure that when they're flying the aircraft they follow the prescribed standard instrument departure. And if I just add to that, at Aer Lingus we've offered the use of our simulator to the DAA, to the IAA, to AirNav so that they can look at alternative flight paths around the airport.
85. GB: Have they taken you up on that?
86. LE: Yes.
87. GB: Good. In terms of the airport cap, obviously it's been there since 2007. Have all of the airlines been raising this as an issue with DAA? And could you give me the year that you first started to raise this as an issue that DAA needed to address?
88. LE: First time we raised the issue of the passenger cap being addressed? Yeah, as we need to have it lifted. 2012, I think, is my recollection.

89. DM: Yeah, I believe we wrote to DAA, Dublin Airport, in 2012, flagging our concerns about the passenger cap and the urgency of resolving it, which is obviously 14 years ago at this point.
90. GB: And any sense as to why the delay, why a planning application only went in a couple of years ago?
91. DM: I'm sure the DAA were in and gave a sort of timeline as to the various events that...
92. GB: They did, several years they were talking, I think 2018-19 before they started to...
93. DM: It would be our view that it wasn't addressed quickly enough in terms of planning applications. Even if you look to the planning application that was made in 2024, that related to infrastructure that had been designed in the capital investment programme in 2018. So it took six years from the defining of the infrastructure that was required for Dublin Airport until the point that the planning application was submitted.
94. GB: And do you think that was out of date then by the time it was submitted?
95. DM: No, there have been inordinate delays over many years in dealing with infrastructure applications, planning applications and obviously the passenger cap.
96. GB: What I mean is they were submitting it on the basis of the data in 2018, but they didn't submit it until 2024. Had the data changed, as in was the planning application appropriate?
97. DM: Clearly, with respect to passenger numbers, passenger numbers last year were over 36 million. So the assumptions that had been made by Dublin Airport with respect to passenger growth, particularly after COVID, were incorrect.
98. GB: And actually, can I ask you, Mr Wilson, when did Ryanair first start to raise the issue with the airport cap?
99. EW: It was certainly prior to COVID. I don't know the exact date, but certainly prior to COVID. But I think during COVID was the time to address this. It should have been done when the second runway was opened. And we saw some of the internal planning issues there.
100. GB: I'm just conscious of time. Did Airlines for America, when did you start raising the issue about the cap with DAA?
101. CS: I think shortly around the COVID time when the second runway came in. I think that's when it became heightened and people understood that there's going to be a huge constraint coming down the road.
102. GB: So Aer Lingus is 2012, and the rest of you are some time after that. Mr Stanton-Geddes, can I ask you about night-time hours and restricted night-time hours? What's the standard across European airports, main European airports, and what measures are other airports taking to address noise and environmental concerns, particularly noise concerns around early departures and late-night departures?
103. MSG: Thank you. A colleague online will be able to take this question, but the first point I'd make, and I'd reiterate what was said earlier, is that the 32 million passenger cap is a planning issue. It's not about noise.
104. GB: I appreciate that, but in having this conversation we do have to take into account the fact that the residents and the community have come up with very different noise decibel levels to those offered here by Mr Wilson. So it's something that we, and I as a TD for the area in which Dublin Airport is located and the communities are located, is something that I'm obviously going to be interested in. And I do know that other airports in Europe are addressing noise issues and have put in other restrictions. And I would like to hear that from you.
105. MSG: That's correct. I see Morgan Foulkes, who's the deputy director, is joining us online to address the noise restrictions at airports.
106. MF: I think there's no... Well, first of all, good morning and thank you for your question. I think that from a general European perspective, we do see at the larger European airports in the centre of Europe a number of measures that are taken with regard to noise, and this is a topic

on which airports have been very, very active in the last 40 years. I think the first types of restrictions were enacted at the London airports in the 1980s and 1990s, and typically these will be restrictions on night flights through movement caps and quota count systems. Now there are different regimes in place at different airports and it can be a movement cap in particular at night. We have night restrictions or curfews. There can be restrictions in the types of aircraft that can be operated.

107. GB: Thank you for that, Mr Foulkes. I've got 29 seconds. Would all of the airlines commit to actually using quieter airplanes during the early morning takeoff, the very late night takeoff, if that was something that would help alleviate concerns? Just yes or no. 13 seconds.
108. EW: They're all quiet.
109. GB: Well, we know that's not true, Mr Wilson.
110. EW: Having a hard rule on times and a quota count is not the way to go. Do it on quota counts, so it encourages airlines to invest in quieter aircraft. That's the way to go, and that's what happens.
111. LE: So an aircraft has to fly the entire day. A successful aviation system where we're generating the ability to drive profits and invest, we can invest in more quieter aircraft, and the new aircraft are 50% quieter than the ones they replace. So a healthy aviation system will solve this issue.
112. CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you.

Chair questions: Open Skies and retaliatory measures

113. CHAIR: Mr Sununu, can I come straight to yourself? Your submission, indeed your opening statement, alludes to potential U.S. retaliatory measures. Could I ask you, potentially and based on precedent, realistically, what could those measures involve and what risks does it pose for Irish carriers?
114. CS: Oh, there's a very strong potential that you would lose flights in New York. You'd lose flights coming to the United States. Absolutely. If you think this administration is going to have one of their bilateral agreements that has been in place a long time violated and they're just going to, you know, take it. In case you haven't read the headlines, that's not what these guys do. If we lose flights over here, you'd likely lose flights over there. We have an amazing opportunity with the technologies that we've put in to have the ability to go back and forth easily. That all comes to a screeching halt, make no mistake. Look what happened in Canada, one of our best trading partners in the world. They stopped certifying our airplanes. The next day we stopped certifying theirs. And it all came to a screeching halt. So this is not an administration that has committed...
115. CHAIR: You mentioned being in the White House last week. Are there active conversations ongoing at the moment between Airlines for America and the U.S. administration with regard to the restriction of the cap? Active conversations.
116. CS: Active conversations. This week.
117. CHAIR: And what kind of conversations?
118. CS: The conversation, again it's a reminder that the vast majority of 160 bilateral agreements that we have in place are here, everyone follows the rules really well, couple of actors here and there. This is the number one issue. I can point to, the administration has said this is a violation of the agreement. No country puts more in terms of direct foreign investment into Ireland. No country puts more into relying on that partnership. But no country will take as immediate retaliation effects as the United States probably would. And it could come in a variety of different means. And if I may, that's a domino effect. It's not just at the airport. It's not just the airlines. Now you have businesses saying, well, if I can't get back and forth at this massive cost of that, they're going to start pulling their money out. That would be terrible. Think of all the jobs that would be affected by that. Think of the economic driver that you are for the entire foundation of Europe. And if I may, you know who wants to see this passenger cap in place more than

anyone? The Brits. You will get a thank you note from the UK government as soon as you keep this in place, because they love it, because all the planes are going to start going there. All the opportunity, all the money is going to go there. Don't let that happen.

119. CHAIR: Okay, thank you. Could I just come to Mr Walsh, just based on your experience as a pilot. I just want to ask about the north runway and the 30 degree turn. And can you explain the, I suppose, the operational necessity for that 30 degree turn and set out clearly why a straight-out departure profile cannot be flown as I think was originally envisaged.
120. WW: All I would say is pilots will fly whatever is determined by the regulators, by the appropriate authorities. So long as the instrument departure is safe, the pilot will fly it. And the aircraft are capable of flying any of the prescribed standard instrument departures and pilots are trained to fly them all. So it's not a decision by the pilot or the airline. It will be a decision that will be taken in other places. It will be directed to the airlines and the airlines will follow it. So as Lynne has said, the simulators are available to the authorities to practice and evaluate other departure routes and if the departure routes are changed the airlines will fully comply with any published departure route.
121. CHAIR: Okay, thank you. Can I just ask, if I may use first names, Lynne and Eddie, have any aircraft, crew, route plans already been diverted to other airports, given the uncertainty around the cap as it currently stands in Dublin Airport? Lynne, first of all. So have any crew, aircraft been already diverted?
122. LE: So not Aer Lingus crew and aircraft, but we operate within a group. We fight for capital and fight for aircraft within that group. We want it for Ireland, but Iberia and Vueling want it for Spain and British Airways wants it for the UK. So to the point made earlier, this isn't about a within-Ireland issue. This is about Ireland gets investment or other countries benefit. And so when we've had the uncertainty of the passenger cap, the appetite to commit, not just aircraft, but you have to recruit pilots, there's a lead time on recruiting pilots, you have to recruit engineers, and taking the risk on recruiting, and this is just about not having growth, let alone the risk of capacity reduction, which I think is serious and needs to be considered by the committee. You don't invest in committing aircraft and the associated recruitment and training for pilots, engineers, and so on, with this level of uncertainty. So Ireland has lost out in the sense that the aircraft within the group have gone elsewhere. Aer Lingus ourselves haven't moved aircraft. I understand.
123. EW: Yeah, I mean, the simple answer is yes. I mean, there's two aircraft, and we've gone from 35 to 33 winter on winter already. So anywhere we have uncertainty. So there's a combination of factors you look at. You obviously look at cost, and you look at whether it's an existing base and your commercial performance, as well as any degree of uncertainty. So two aircraft, like we're growing by, we've gone up by one aircraft in Shannon. But we've gone down in Dublin with a combination of those factors, and we would have had an additional 28 aircraft to allocate this winter.
124. CHAIR: And my final question then is, you know, there's been some discussion within the committee, the extent to which so much traffic is going through Dublin Airport. I think 85% of all airline traffic goes through Dublin Airport, and you talk a lot about economic issues, the economic benefit, potential economic losses as a result of the cap. Is it a good thing for Ireland that we have so much traffic going through one particular airport? Like for me, should there be a critical incident at Dublin Airport, the impact that that may potentially have on the Irish economy? So I suppose I'm really asking you about growth at regional airports. And I know you mentioned Ryanair's growth at Cork and Shannon, and I think I saw something online was Michael O'Leary in Knock. What factors determine, it's doubling, doubling, doubling? Why not more investment, more growth at our regional airports, Cork, Shannon in particular?
125. EW: It is happening, but it's demand-led. And then it's up to the airline whether the airline puts on the capacity or not, and that's a combination of, you know, cost, level of certainty, et cetera. So you can't get people to go where they don't want to go. Like, people choose...
126. CHAIR: I could just explain that. What do you mean people, they want to go where they want to

go?

127. EW: Well, when you go on a website, you have a drop-down menu, and you want to go to Dublin, you go to Dublin. You're going to be pretty surprised if you land in Shannon. You know, so it's, you can't force people to go. You can't plan centrally in an open economy. People choose where they want to go.
128. CHAIR: I think for people like myself, it's a lot easier to go to Cork or Shannon than it is to Dublin. We don't have that choice.
129. EW: Well, people will. You'll be surprised what people will do with price, you know, or how far they will drive.
130. CHAIR: And just briefly, Lynne, my time has gone, unfortunately.
131. LE: We'll serve Cork and Shannon when there's point-to-point demand to fly out of Cork or Shannon. But constraining Dublin will not result in any more traffic to Cork or Shannon. We operate as a hub. We've already said 17th largest economy. We're now the second biggest across the Atlantic. We're the second biggest across the Atlantic out of Europe because of the hub. You need to feed from Europe, gather customers, send them to the US. You just won't have that.
132. CHAIR: And if I could just give an example. It's a hub dynamic. I spent 10 years in Brussels. I could never understand why there was never a Cork or Shannon flight direct to Brussels. Just had to get that off my chest. Finally, Willie.
133. WW: Yeah, just to say, if you're looking at attracting new airlines into Ireland, they will do their analysis based on traffic flows and an assessment of where they can grow traffic. So if you look at the map of routes served by Dublin, it's largely Europe and North America. Ireland is not connected to Asia, to Africa, and it is missing out on massive opportunities for connectivity. There are no or few direct flights to China, Japan, India, Brazil, Mexico, South Korea, Australia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, all of these are bigger economies than Ireland. You will not get an airline from any of these countries looking at an option other than Dublin. And Dublin ranks, I think in 2024, as number 69 on the busiest airports globally. Shannon doesn't appear on any list. So the idea that airlines outside of Ireland are going to consider flying to Shannon, it's just nonsense.
134. CHAIR: You need to put it to bed. It's never going to happen. In the context of the other 26 member states, 85% of national traffic going through a single airport. I have to be fair to my colleagues. We'll have a second round.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke (substituting for Deputy Ann Graves)

135. CHAIR: I think in terms of the rota, Deputy Ann Graves.
136. DOR: Listen, thanks very much for your contributions. I represent Fingal East, which is the residents that are worst affected, so it's always going to be what I've heard about. And I'm actually a bit surprised at the attitude of the airlines, the suck-it-up attitude. You know, there are people that are living there that were living there long before the airport, generations ago, out around St Margaret's, but there are new estates that were built, and they were built based on flight paths, and those flight paths have changed. I think just to remind airlines that your slots are permissions, they're not your property.
137. DOR: One of the things that I would like to point out, the cap has never been adhered to. It has never been adhered to since it was implemented. And it was put in by An Bord Pleanála to address the major kind of infrastructure requirements that are needed around the airport. And they haven't been put in place. And all the talk about the growth in economy and the increase in, you know, activity around the airport. I live in Swords. You can't get in or out of Swords. It's already a mess. So to say that it's a good thing to increase all that extra transport, we don't have a metro, it's promised for 35 years. We're probably one of the only cities that doesn't have transport in and out of the airport.

138. DOR: I do not want to stand in the way of progress but we do need to consider the people that are affected by it and we talk about the evidence of removing the cap and how great that would be for economy but there's also evidence that the more noise that there is from flights, the more impact there is on people's health and well-being. And we look at international best practice and they're reducing the time that people can fly at night times and they've done it in Australia and they're doing it in other places.
139. DOR: So look, just to move on, and I have to leave because I have to speak in the chamber, so I'll just get through a few quick questions. For all of the airlines, I'd like to know if the DAA were to act tomorrow and to return the flight path to the straight-ahead departures that was part of the 2007 environmental impact statement, would any of the airlines have objections?
140. DOR: Nobody?
141. LE: No, we follow the path.
142. DOR: Okay. And then just a question for Airlines for America and Aer Lingus. Can you tell me what percentage of your transatlantic passengers originate from short-haul flights and never actually leave the airport? So, you know, people that are going from one plane to another, you know, or even in Ryanair, where they're going from Terminal 1 to Terminal 2 to get onto a US carrier, they don't actually contribute anything to the Irish economy, probably don't even buy a cup of coffee. So this idea that it's going to increase... So I just want to know what the percentages are in terms of the people that don't.
143. LE: Let me comment. They absolutely contribute to the Irish economy. The only reason a country of six, seven million people have the level of connectivity that Ireland has is because of the hub and because of the connectivity. So that's why the hub is so critical. It's why we can't replace Dublin flying with Shannon and Cork flying, regional flying. So we have currently about 30... The only reason we can fill aircraft to the US is because we take 30, 40, on some routes, 60, 70% of the traffic comes from the rest of Europe. That allows Aer Lingus to fly to places that Ireland would not be connected to.
144. DOR: But the argument is that it's contributing to the economy, it's helping the economy. The only people that are making money, so if you have somebody that gets on a plane in Europe, connects and doesn't get off the plane, moves on to another flight, the only people that are making money out of that are the airlines and the DAA.
145. LE: Absolutely not. Ireland would not have the connectivity it has without those connecting passengers. If you don't have connections to Indianapolis, to frequency to New York, to Chicago, everywhere across the US, all of that brings valuable people into Ireland, it supports the economy, it supports business, it supports growth, and the only reason you have that is because of those connecting passengers. Take those connecting passengers away and the connectivity in Ireland will plummet.
146. EW: On point-to-point traffic, you would have approximately 65%, which would be inbound, where on point-to-point, people get off the airplane and spend money in the economy. And you support lots of other things, like connectivity for families going to see friends and relatives, going to see their kids in college, people who actually work in places like the National Health Service in the UK and live in Ireland and move backwards and forwards all the time.
147. DOR: But I'm talking about people that literally just get on a plane, they don't get off the plane or else they just transfer to another flight within the airport. I just want to move on and specifically ask you about the Ryanair statement that their new aircraft is 50% quieter. So if that's the case, how come the noise is escalating to 343% above what the noise abatement objective in 2019 was? So can you tell me how many decibels quieter it is? The DAA monitoring says only three decibels less than it currently was, so it's 50% quieter.
148. EW: But the consultants that they employed to do this had to go back to the drawing board, and the EU has referred it back as well, because they didn't look at the... The way to look at noise is, does it make noise or not? Not the times of the day. And the aircraft that we have are 50% quieter than they were on the original aircraft that we had. 737-200 now to the 737 MAX

8 and MAX 10. The MAX 10 is 50% quieter. So you manage that. That's what all other airports do around Europe. They do a sort of a quota system. So that encourages airlines to invest in those quieter aircraft so that you can, it's almost like a budget of how many, and it discourages it. Like there are some airports, for example, that don't allow noisy aircraft at certain times. All those things make sense. You can't just take arbitrary times or whatever because it affects how airlines operate. It would affect how the transatlantic would operate because they can't always say when they're going to arrive because of weather conditions. And from a Ryanair point of view, the based aircraft or any short-haul operator has to have a based aircraft starting between the critical time of 6 and 7 in the morning so that you can actually base an aircraft there. If you can't do that, it'll just migrate somewhere else.

149. DOR: Yeah, but look, and I do get your point, but I mean, the night-time flights are the worst in terms of people's health and well-being. So if you're awoken from sleep at night, and it happens, you know, it does happen. I live in the area, I know exactly what it's like, you know. I'm lucky enough that I don't live on a direct flight path, so, you know, I'm fine. People down the road from me are on a direct flight path. And I know being awoken from your sleep has an impact on people, hasn't it? Impact on their hearts, it has an impact on their health and everything else.
150. EW: Yeah, but if you look at the studies that we've done, it doesn't get above 50 decibels, about 53 decibels when the aircraft are overhead. We did a study on this over just where the aircraft take off and make that right turn, you know, over St Margaret's and over Ashbourne and places like that, the aircraft are remarkably quiet. But if you live, no matter what happens, if the airplanes turn somewhere else, they're going to go over someone else's house. If you live beside an airport, you're going to have some level of disruption.
151. DOR: But people are not talking about noise in the distance. They're talking about the extreme noise. But even overhead, it's proven to be bad for your health. Thank you, thank you.
152. CHAIR: We'll have a second round.

Deputy Cathal Crowe (deferred) / Deputy Roderic O'Gorman

153. CHAIR: Deputy Cathal Crowe, please.
154. CC: I was at another meeting, so I might come in after the next speaker, if that's okay.
155. ROG: Thanks, Chair. Good morning, everyone. Thanks for your submissions today. Mr Sununu, I might put a couple of questions to yourself, if that's all right. Your organisation joins the two airlines here and some other airlines in taking a case against the passenger cap in the Irish High Court, I understand. Yes. That was referred to the European Court of Justice and there was an opinion of the Advocate General in the Court of Justice in February of this year. Is it fair to say that the Advocate General opinion came out fairly strongly against your position and held that the passenger cap isn't a violation of EU law?
156. CS: It's fair, but again that's why this body needs to act because the detrimental effects of that would be huge and that's why again if we can sit around and have things stayed, we can sit around and wait until what happens this fall, we can sit around for another hearing. But, you know, if I may, I want to address something that was brought up. You lose 10 or 15 percent of the passengers. You lose 10 or 15 percent of the jobs.
157. ROG: This is my bit of question. I only have eight minutes. And obviously the Court of Justice follows the Advocate General's ruling in about 70 to 80 percent. So I say that because the term violated, unlawful, these words have been used quite a lot today. And it's just the clearest statement we have from the European Court of Justice is that the passenger cap is not in breach of law. Now, I understand. We're waiting for a court decision from the Court of Justice. I just think it's important that that's on the record.
158. CS: But it violates our agreement that our countries have had. It's a direct violation of that. Clear as day. On open skies.

159. ROG: Did your legal team raise the violation of open skies when the matter was discussed in the Irish High Court? In the Irish High Court, this was our position.
160. KG: Before the European Court of Justice, the matter of international law is not under consideration. Because as it was referred to by the Irish High Court, they only sent them a question about EU domestic law. So as it applies within the EU, but not as it applies to the commitments of Ireland under the US-EU Open Skies Agreement.
161. ROG: And are there processes under the Open Skies Agreement where the issues that your organizations have with the passenger cap can be addressed? Sure.
162. KG: So under the Open Skies Agreement there are obligations from each side to allow for these flights to occur. When those flights don't occur then there are provisions within the agreement and provisions within the regulations of the US Department of Transportation to discipline the marketplace to ensure that we have fair and equal opportunity to compete.
163. ROG: And where an issue comes up, is there a concept of a joint committee being convened to examine the particular issue and look to tease out a resolution?
164. KG: Under the US-EU Open Skies Agreement, there is a provision for a special session of a joint committee, and those conversations can happen formally or informally, and our understanding is that the US government, the EU, and the Irish governments are having those conversations informally.
165. ROG: So has a joint committee on the concerns with the passenger cap been established?
166. KG: So the joint committee is an establishment that sits aside, apart from any particular issue, it meets annually and this issue was raised in the last joint committee.
167. ROG: And what's the resolution on it from the joint committee?
168. KG: That the EU would continue to work on the issue.
169. ROG: In what way?
170. KG: That's a great question and that's why we're here. For a resolution. We're looking for a resolution. So, you know, a joint committee is basically a policy talk shop between the two governments.
171. ROG: Your organization, Mr Sununu, I think has previously taken a case about an EU measure, an EU-wide measure, the emission trading system, potentially breaching the Open Skies Agreement. And I think the emission trading system was found not to breach Open Skies. Is that correct? I believe that's right. That was from 2011.
172. ROG: The overall decision on open skies, I suppose, you've been very clear in your submission, Mr Sununu, you said that there's a risk of retaliation here. And I suppose it's just not clear to me where it has been established that there is a violation of open skies.
173. CS: Open Skies Agreement is very clear that you allow unfettered, unlimited access to the capacity of the airport. This wouldn't be doing that. This airport could take 40 million people. But you're saying, no, we're going to limit it. We're going to violate that open, free access. You can have as many flights you want, as many passengers as you want. That's all understood. But this violates that.
174. ROG: But I think, I suppose, it's your understanding, it's your position, it's your organization's position that there's a violation, but it actually hasn't been...
175. CS: It's the U.S. government's position.
176. ROG: And the U.S. government's position, but it actually hasn't been found to be a violation at any point at this stage, has it?
177. CS: Yes, it has. Read the statement. It's a clear violation. You cannot artificially limit access. That's a violation.

178. ROG: That's it. With respect, you saying you think that it's a violation isn't defining that it's a violation. This is an international agreement and I'm not clear has the legality been tested in an international forum that the cap here represents a violation.
179. KG: Here, look, the Irish High Court's issuing of a stay shows that there is irreparable harm. And the reason that that standard is used in the court to issue a stay is that they look at the case and say, it is far more likely that there is a problem here under this agreement. Therefore, we issue the stay so that the airlines and those parties to the agreement are not harmed unnecessarily while we figure out exactly how the application of the agreement works.
180. ROG: Well, with respect, the stay is related to the process of referring a case up to the European Court of Justice and it's not unusual.
181. DM: If I may give a perspective on this. From an Aer Lingus perspective, US Airlines have not suffered any past or present harm in relation to the passenger cap because of the legal strategy that has been implemented that has resulted in a stay on the enforcement of the passenger cap and the reference to the Court of Justice of the European Union. So it's our view that there's no past or present harm and that's reflected in the capacity growth that's been seen in Dublin and to Ireland from North American carriers. However, it is incumbent on the government to urgently pass the legislation, issue the ministerial order so as to ensure that there is no future harm. But it's our strong view, and I think it's borne out by the facts, that there has been no past or present harm to date.
182. ROG: In terms of open skies, does it provide an unlimited right to slots for US airlines across European airports? An unlimited right, that's your contention?
183. CS: As long as they're available, yes, to the point of availability.
184. ROG: To the point of availability. And is the ruling or the opinion of the Advocate General, is that not very clearly stating under EU law that the constraint that the cap represents is one of those issues that, in this case, the Irish airport authorities have to take into account in determining whether there is capacity? Is that not one of the central findings of the Advocate General?
185. KG: But that's applicable to EU domestic legislation. That sits underneath the international treaty obligations of the government of Ireland and that of the EU and of the United States. They supersede those issues. So while you can have that, a cap that might apply to domestic routings here, that cap would not apply then to the international operations.
186. ROG: And in the Irish courts, you didn't ask the judge to refer that question because that really seems to be the nub of it, that balance between EU law and the Open Skies Agreement. You didn't ask that to be referred up to the Court of Justice, did you?
187. KG: It is not a question for the European Court of Justice. No, it is not.
188. CHAIR: Thank you. And just briefly to follow on from that, and notwithstanding the pending decision of the European Court of Justice, again, it's your position that the threat of US retaliation has been discussed, that that threat is real, and concrete measures like restricting Aer Lingus access has been explicitly discussed. Yes.

Deputy Cathal Crowe

189. CHAIR: Deputy Crowe.
190. CC: Chairman, apologies, there was another meeting coinciding and I was following this remotely. Just to welcome all of our guests. Just at the outset, I take great exception to the term violation being used and reciprocal threats and all of this. Open skies is a multilateral agreement between countries, not between airports. So if this was an agreement that Dublin had struck with JFK or Chicago, whatever, then rightly you could say that the imposition of a cap, whether you like it or not, could be a barrier to open skies. But open skies is a multilateral international country-to-country agreement, set out in 2007, sorry, the cap was introduced in 2007, Open Skies came in 2008. So firstly, I want to ask, were you objectionable to this at the time that Open Skies became an agreement? Did you raise this at the time?

191. CS: I think there was concern on all the airlines the second it came into play. I think the question was, the hope was it would disappear. People would realize that it was a violation. And as the pressure built and as the reality of flights leaving and the economic realities came to bear, that there would be a change. And we're kind of at that point now. The pressure has built to the point.
192. CC: But you've waited 19 years for pressure to build to a point where you're taking action.
193. CS: Well, the action that we're looking, the, again I don't represent the government, I represent the airlines and the airlines' message is very clear. We have to make decisions, we have to make decisions to move equipment and flights. We're not going to wait for a court decision here and a court decision there because they have to be, these decisions have been made so far in advance.
194. CC: You once, quite recently, up to quite recently, you held high political office. This is our parliament. Would you withdraw, please, the use of the term violation because it doesn't represent where things are at. The truth is, the truth is that Ireland Inc., we've many airports. They may not all be big, and some are quite small. Some cannot take transatlantic flights. But Shannon Airport, in my constituency, is perfectly configured. As I said yesterday, without adding a single brick to the terminal building, without adding a single inch to the runway, it can take double the amount of flights. It can take all the American carriers, and it takes many of them. So the Open Skies Agreement, at this moment, it's a commercial decision for US Airlines. They're choosing to fly into the capital. That's fine. I don't necessarily agree with all of that, but that's fine. But to call it a violation is simply a misrepresentation of this. They can fly into Shannon. Ireland Inc. has adequate airport landing slots, adequate runway space, adequate everything to cater for US Airlines. So they're making a commercial decision here. And to come into our parliament and to say it's a violation of our government, our parliament, is absolutely disingenuous. And I'm asking you to withdraw that.
195. CS: No, it's 100% spot on.
196. CC: But stand over it then legally. Tell me why is it a violation?
197. CS: It's spot on. Because, again, it's, the agreement says that when the airport, it's not an airport to airport agreement, yes, but it's airport to airport access and it's access to slots, it's access to gates. And it can't be, we deal with this issue, this isn't unique here. We have a couple of smaller other issues in other parts of Europe and again every country has multiple airports but these are still very real issues for each of these localities.
198. CC: Yeah, but the truth of this is, and this was flagged to me in the back channels before St Patrick's Day, that when our ministers are in the US, they're going to be hit with this message at all the functions they go to, that the US isn't happy. They'll retaliate, a term that's crept in far too much in US politics, if you ask me, but that's for others to answer. But the reality is this is not a violation. There's adequate capacity in other Irish airports to cater for a certain amount, and then you get to the cap point.
199. CC: Could I just go back to, with two of our major airlines here, and thank you for all you're doing, I suppose, in our country to get people in and out, and you're valued in our Irish economy. Could I just ask, I've been making the point here in this committee that one thing that's missing at the moment, and other countries have it, is that there's no cognizance given here of balanced regional development. I know you're both going to come back and say, commercial decisions, we fly where the passengers want, we meet demand. But the Dutch have brought in, it is aligned and it is proved by EU regulation clauses where certain flights will go into the capital, into Schiphol. If it's a holiday flight, if you're going to the sun, it's probably out of Rotterdam. Within the routes that you operate, is there anything that could work here that could get more out to the regions?
200. EW: I don't know where people are coming from with this Dutch system. They're the greatest gamers of aircraft capacity that's ever been known. They've got the most expensive airports. And I can't think of a regional airport that you're talking about in Holland or in the Netherlands that takes traffic. Look, it costs you 100 euros per passenger to land in Schiphol at the moment,

and that's the reason they're sort of maxed out. But, like, Ryanair has really, I mean, developed regional connectivity here, point to point, and you'll know this from Shannon, where you've got international traffic. We've doubled it since before COVID. We've got four aircraft based in Shannon. You've got Knock Airport with just, like Knock is a miracle in more ways than one, right? We always put it out there in Europe to show the West of Ireland Airport with no city within 50 miles of it, bar Galway, is able to attract almost a million passengers.

201. EW: We want to get real here. Ireland is one of the most connected places. There's less than 5 million people in this country. And what we have here is we can all dance on the head of a pin here. This is self-inflicted. We've got a passenger cap. There isn't another airport, there isn't another airport in Europe that constrains capacity based on road access from 2007. It doesn't exist, right? Airports are restricted because of slots, because of runway capacity, because of terminal capacity. Dublin can take today I think another 10 or 15 million passengers and we are restricting one of the greatest success stories that we have in Europe in terms of low-cost connectivity, not just with Ryanair into Europe, but with transatlantic, not just with Aer Lingus, but all the other American carriers.
202. CC: Will you please tell me how you navigate your way around the Dutch regulations? You mightn't like them. Many people don't like them, but they do exist.
203. EW: I don't like them. They don't exist. There's no regional airport structure. I've gone to meetings in the Netherlands and I've done Utrecht, Amsterdam and Rotterdam before lunchtime in a car. It's a tiny country. They don't have regional airports.
204. CC: Ms Embleton and Mr Moriarty, I might ask yourselves. You might give us some insight into the logic of Aer Lingus here, because one of the things I often bemoan is that everything at the moment in recent years, it's either hub to hub or it's the budget airline sector or it's hub to hub. Why is it that Dublin today will have 16 services in and out of Dublin to Amsterdam Schiphol and the other regions of Ireland don't? Is there anything that's, what's informing all of these decisions? Surely the market alone, surely a lot of that passenger base is travelling up from the country to go to Dublin. You might just enlighten us, why is everything out of the capital?
205. LE: First and foremost, we follow demand, and we put our aircraft where we think we can make a return on that aircraft. But from an Aer Lingus perspective, I do want to come back to this concept. The hub matters. The only reason we have the connectivity that we have is because we take customers from around Europe and the UK, we channel them over Dublin, and we send them to the US, and that gives Ireland punching way above its weight in terms of connectivity.
206. CC: I'd agree with that.
207. LE: And I have choices and trade-offs about where I put aircraft. I don't have an unlimited supply of aircraft and we have to make the returns to justify getting the aircraft.
208. CC: And with the closure of Manchester, will there be any dividend for Dublin, Shannon, Cork arising from that?
209. LE: So we are looking at what the application of those two long-haul aircraft that we had in Manchester long-haul. But I come back to, I'm not the only one within our group fighting for aircraft and those aircraft are in demand. We have to follow the money.
210. CHAIR: Thank you very much. Thank you.

Deputy Gillian Toole (Round 1)

211. CHAIR: I did say that I would allow Deputy Toole in this first round, perhaps also the second. We'll go to a second round shortly. Five minutes.
212. GT: Good morning, everybody. Apologies, I was late by virtue of being at another committee. I represent an area called Meath East, which is a commuter area just north of the city.
213. GT: And the area that I would like to focus on, and I think it's fair to say across all of your organisations, having looked at your websites, gone through policies, etc., the common denominator

is sustainability, adherence to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, different policies relating to, for example, Ryanair, you do not see competitive advantage through illegal or unethical business practices. Aer Lingus, you support your people and your local community, the Takeoff Foundation, so very much people-oriented, Open Skies, connecting people, connecting communities, and absolutely without a doubt the importance of Dublin Airport from an employment perspective to people living in my area, for connectivity with the diaspora, for the extremely important economic benefits, inward and outward bound traffic.

214. GT: But coming back to that single piece of sustainability and the SDGs, and if we take, for example, they're founded on five pillars, and the first pillar in the list is people. And if we take SDG number three, good health and wellbeing, 11, sustainable communities, 15, get outdoors, and 17, partnerships.
215. GT: But the community that I represent, the best part of 30,000 people that are impacted by the change to the flight paths, they're currently, and this has been economically assessed, bearing the brunt of an 800 million euro a year health impact because of the flights that are flying on the path that was never part of the noise preferential corridor. It was never part of an environmental impact assessment back in 2007. There was no consultation.
216. GT: There is a simple fix to it and it has been put forward by the North Runway Technical Group. And that's simply to adhere to the five nautical mile straight-out route. And even that and the dependent mode operation of the North and South Runways, that in itself will enable an increase in capacity.
217. GT: What objections do your organisations either separately or collectively have to the North Runway being used in the way that it was intended to? And the EIA was carried out in 2007.
218. CHAIR: Do you want to direct your questions? We just have two minutes, someone in particular.
219. GT: Yeah, individually, I suppose primarily with the airlines, it's most relevant. But again, keeping that balance, keeping people, and these are the people on the ground.
220. EW: We covered it earlier. I mean, we take those instructions, and if the flight paths change, the flight paths change. It's as simple as that. I mean, and that's the case. I mean, it's not a question of planning permission or anything. This is set down. Your question should be towards AirNav, who actually put down the routes. But I presume if it doesn't turn right, it'll go over someone else's house. The reality that we have here is that if you live near an airport, there's going to be an impact. But the good news is that aircraft are getting quieter, but they have to fly over somewhere. And I don't think there's any green area right out of Dublin going west where you're not going to go over some area. But the short answer is no objections.
221. GT: So saving time, saving fuel or not saving time, not saving fuel is relevant or irrelevant?
222. EW: Absolutely zero. We do exactly what we're told in every airport, which is if you have to fly there, you have to fly in a figure of eight because that's the best one and that's what we have to do. Like it's set down. Like Willie is the former pilot. I'm sure he'll give the exact detail on that.
223. WW: Yeah, absolutely. The departure routing will be followed. The airlines don't determine the departure routing. The pilot doesn't determine the departure routing. So if they publish a different departure routing at Dublin, the airlines will comply 100%. There's no objection to it.
224. GT: So in order then, and this is just a simple approach, taking a personal fly on it, would you make an approach to DAA, IAA etc, to actually ask for this to be implemented? Because potentially, as the bill progresses, there will be public pressure building on public representatives to support or not support, as the case may be. Is that something that can be explored? I know this is very simple but it's very relevant.
225. LE: If I may answer that one, so first I want to echo what we said, we have no discretion over the flight path we take when we take off. We follow the standard instrument departure route every time. So we are 100% compliant. I've got a letter in front of me from the 22nd of January 2025 where we have written to the DAA on exactly this issue and we've offered our technical

support in helping them resolve it but urging them to resolve it. I've got a letter in front of me from 29th of April 2025 where we've written to the DAA saying this issue needs to be resolved. We notice a discrepancy between the SID path that we fly and the straight-out path that was in the planning and we've offered our help and support and asked them to address it.

226. GT: Can I ask you, can you supply those correspondences to the committee, please?

227. LE: I will check that with my team before I do that.

228. CHAIR: Thank you. Before we go into a second round, I just want to make sure, does any of our witnesses need a quick break or anything like that? Everybody okay? Thank you. We're just going to a second round, maybe five minutes again. Same type of rota.

Q&A Round 2

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee

229. CHAIR: First of all, Senator Clifford-Lee.

230. CL: I remind you, we're the Upper House, Deputy. Maybe you could recheck that.

231. CL: Thank you very much. And I just want to pick up on the point there Deputy Toole raised. If you could supply that correspondence, that would be very helpful. And I think it would actually go a long way to resolving a lot of the problems in relation to the flight paths, and this is certainly new information to us here who have been engaging with the communities over the past number of years. And that would be very helpful from our point of view, and as Deputy Toole said, the pressure is obviously on those of us who are near the airport, and we certainly want to kind of resolve the situation in a positive way, keeping in mind the communities around the airport.

232. CL: And I'd like to put on record that I am fully in support of Dublin Airport and I recognise the economic benefit not only to the communities around but the country. And I'm in favour of the cap lifting, but I'm in favour of the communities just being dealt with fairly, and that's the main reason that I'm here. And like I said, the vast majority of people around St Margaret's have been there for generations, long before Dublin Airport. So I think we need to work in a collaborative fashion to resolve the issues and I don't think they're unresolvable. So anything that any of you can do to work with us members on the committee to move things forward, I'd appreciate it.

233. CL: It's good to have that on the record here today, that you wouldn't object to flying any flight path that might resolve issues and that you're offering your technical expertise to the DAA to resolve that. That's something that we can all work on.

234. CL: Ms Embleton, the point that you made in relation to the hub and the direct economic benefit that Dublin presents as a hub and allowing for the connectivity, I think is a very important point. And if that hub status was to diminish, what would the impact be on the connectivity and the number of flights that would be able to be supported by the domestic demand?

235. LE: It's well established that hubs are exponential. The more feed you give them, the more new routes you can open up. So if I do a rough rule of thumb, if we've got the second biggest North Atlantic network and yet we are the 17th biggest economy, you can see what would happen without the hub. It would collapse exponentially if we don't have the ability to feed it. And every one of those destinations, more than 20 destinations in the U.S., bring value to the Irish economy. So it's a significant issue.

236. LE: And I think it's really important we come back to this topic because although I do understand the local issues around noise and the environment, fundamentally this is a national choice for Ireland. And we are facing, if there is not action faster than I fear that the action is happening, to remove the cap and to bring the legislation in, we are looking at the serious risk of cancelled trips, lost jobs, economic harm and higher fares. And that risk is right on our doorstep. And that's where we need to be putting our effort, I believe, in how do we accelerate removal of this cap because we are looking at a very serious situation very soon if this isn't resolved.

237. CL: So the economic benefit, let's say if there are maybe 30 passengers on a flight connecting through Dublin and going transatlantic, if they were, let's say, not to connect to a flight and if they went off and spent, you know, five days in Dublin, the economic benefit of that is far less than the actual overall economic benefit of having the hub status and the direct flights and the number of direct flights?
238. LE: We bring more than 2 million people across the Atlantic. We've grown that something like 20-30% since COVID. That's bringing real value. We can't do that without a hub. If we have to take a 12% reduction, let alone stopping future growth, then we will unwind much of the development we've done in our transatlantic network, which supports not only foreign direct investment. It supports bringing people to Ireland for business and for leisure. And importantly, it supports Irish jobs. These are Irish pilots, Irish engineers, Irish cabin crew, and a whole infrastructure of Irish jobs that depend on aviation. And those jobs aren't just in Dublin. We have engineering and other facilities right across Ireland that we draw on to support the Aer Lingus operation.
239. CL: Thank you for clarifying that. And just a small amount of time left, I just want to make a brief comment in relation to foreign direct investment. And it was stated that the foreign direct investment from the United States into Ireland is significant. We all acknowledge that. But in 2024, 30.1 billion US dollars from Irish companies was invested into the United States. And that should also be acknowledged alongside the foreign direct investment from the United States into Ireland. Thank you.

Chair: Retaliation and infrastructure

240. CHAIR: Ms Embleton, you heard the evidence of Airlines for America that the threat of retaliatory measures is real, is actively being discussed with the U.S. administration, and in particular measures that target Aer Lingus' access to U.S. airports. Do you think that's simply a negotiating tactic by Airlines for America aimed at putting pressure on the Irish government to act, or do you consider the threat real, and has there been any direct or indirect contact from US regulatory authorities in this regard?
241. LE: So with the last question, the answer is no, no direct contact.
242. CHAIR: Indirect contact?
243. LE: No. However, do I think this is real? Absolutely, I think this is real. Let's look at the geopolitical situation. I don't want to predict what happens next tomorrow, let alone over the course of the next few months. But the geopolitical situation is very active and sometimes unpredictable. And I think there is a serious risk of retaliation, absolutely. But even without the retaliation, let me just be clear, what happens if this cap is enacted? Forget the retaliation. We're looking at a 12% reduction next year if this cap is not lifted, if the IAA take the cap into account when they declare capacity. That's loss of jobs, that's higher airfares, that's economic damage ourselves. That's the damage we'll be doing to ourselves as Ireland, regardless of the help in damage that the US will put on top of that.
244. CHAIR: Do you want to comment on that, Mr Walsh?
245. WW: Yeah, I can say from my experience the threat is absolutely real.
246. CHAIR: Is there a precedent for such retaliatory action? I know Canada was mentioned.
247. WW: Yeah, there are plenty of... And notwithstanding the legal position, at the end of the day, the US administration tends to do what it wants to do. And you would expect governments to act in the best interest of their consumers. So if there was an opportunity that the US government believed was at the expense of facilitating somebody else, you would expect the Irish government to act. So without question, this is real. This is high risk. And as Lynne says, it's not just the risk of retaliation. There's an immediate risk to what's in Dublin Airport today, what's operating in Dublin Airport today, if you have to reduce the number of slots associated with implementing a cap, which in itself is a major problem.

248. WW: Because when I go back, when I took over as CEO in Aer Lingus in 2001, average occupancy of a flight into Dublin was 90 passengers. In 2007, it was 121. And this year, I think it'll be about 155. So, you know, what you're getting is, you know, if the industry continues to perform well like that, you're imposing new restrictions all the time. So this will have a disastrous impact. And actually, I think we'll start reversing a lot of the benefits that Ireland has achieved over the past 10 years.
249. CHAIR: Can I briefly talk about the Dublin Airport Authority? We have had a number of hearings to date, a lot of discussions around infrastructure, waste water, noise mitigation, emissions, community impacts and so on. Is there any area in terms of that critical infrastructure that's a concern, particularly to Ryanair and Aer Lingus, whether any binding obligations should be put on the Dublin Airport Authority should the cap be lifted?
250. EW: I mean, you look at what the capex is, and they still haven't published it, by the way. They haven't given the detail of it to the IAA, who now performed the functions that the CAR previously did. But notwithstanding that, they're talking about spending 9 billion dollars on upgrading the airport. And you look at, say, in Spain, and we don't agree with the Spanish either, they want to invest 9 billion in 46 airports, including major hubs at Madrid and Barcelona. This is off the wall. They are going to become, because, you know, again, the narrative here sometimes is always to do it as if traffic is going to move from Dublin to Shannon or Cork. There are airports in London at the moment now who are delighted that the cap, if it goes ahead, because they will get the traffic straight away. OK, there's two aircraft already gone and that's what's going to happen. It's going to migrate. They're going to make themselves uncompetitive.
251. CHAIR: But just my question, whether any binding obligations should be put on the Dublin Airport Authority should we decide to remove the cap?
252. EW: Well, I mean, you're into another structure with the IAA. The IAA determined the cost base and approved the, to approve the capital expenditure, and the capital expenditure is nuts. You know, they're building tunnels on their runways and all that.
253. LE: The short answer to your question is no. The airport's already shown it can operate with more than the cap. We're operating with 36 now.
254. CHAIR: You are aware that there are significant wastewater issues at Ringsend, for example.
255. LE: I am. The airport hasn't yet implemented any of its development plan. That development plan has been around since 2018-2019. They need to get on with implementing the plan they have. But the IAA's capacity declaration of stands and capacity will take that into account.
256. CHAIR: Thank you.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman

257. CHAIR: Deputy O'Gorman.
258. ROG: Thanks, Chair. When the passenger cap was introduced in 2007, it wasn't meant as a climate mitigation measure. It was based on infrastructure. And look, if we were designing a climate measure for Dublin Airport, certainly I wouldn't be picking a cap. I don't think that's an effective one. But nevertheless, I think we all recognise that removing the cap and the consequent growth in flights in and out of the airport is going to have a climate implication. And both our airlines here today have made it very clear they're looking to grow numbers, grow flights through the airport.
259. ROG: So across all the five opening statements we got today, I was very struck that the issue of climate didn't come up at all. Now, I'm conscious you're all here. You're representing stakeholders. You're representing shareholders. But I suppose as legislators, we have to look at the whole picture here as well. So maybe just to the two airlines, to Ryanair and to Aer Lingus, is there any upper limit to the growth of Dublin Airport that you'd see as acceptable? And how do the very significant growth plans that you outline for your two airlines, how does that impact on

Ireland's international obligations under the Paris Agreement in terms of reducing our climate emissions?

260. WW: Can I just comment globally? Because I've heard people say this, that passenger numbers is a proxy for environmental issues. It's not. So just to give you an example, since 2007, globally, passenger numbers have doubled from about just under 2.5 billion to 5 billion. In the same period, CO2 emissions have increased by 45%. So it's not a like for like, because the industry has become more efficient. Now, CO2 has increased, but I think people who say there's a direct correlation... So therefore you can continue to grow the passenger numbers without a meaningful impact on the environment.
261. ROG: Without a meaningful impact on the environment. So let's say the growth from 32 million, the cap at the moment, to 40 million, you don't think there will be a meaningful increase in CO2 emissions as a result of that?
262. WW: No, I don't, because it will depend on the aircraft that have been used, the routes that are being operated, the type of fuel being used. There are a lot of factors that would impact that. Aircraft that are being introduced are significantly more fuel efficient than the aircraft that they're replacing.
263. ROG: And then if we go beyond, and I suppose that's to my other question, if we go beyond 40 million, a wider growth of Dublin Airport and the throughput of passengers, you again think that can be done?
264. WW: Well, as an industry, we have committed to achieving net zero by 2050. So these things go hand in hand. The longer-term objective to get to net zero in 2050, which will be facilitated by a number of measures, including the use of sustainable fuels, new technology, advances in air traffic control.
265. ROG: SAF is still very much in its infancy, isn't it, Mr Walsh? So there's a lot of hope in your reliance on SAF at the moment to meet that net zero target, is it not fair to say?
266. WW: I'd say it's more than hope. It's a reality. We know that it's technologically possible. As you know, the EU is mandating the use of sustainable fuels and that governments around the world are facilitating that and several governments are also incentivising the production of sustainable fuels.
267. ROG: But Mr Walsh, at the scale to both replace the fuel in existing flights and meet the fuel in the new flights that both of our airlines have indicated they wish to drive forward, it's a huge ask in terms of carbon neutrality by 2050 on the technology that is still in its infancy.
268. WW: It is a big ask, but it is technically possible to achieve it. We have demonstrated there is a credible path to net zero in 2050. It is extremely difficult, challenging, and expensive, but it is a credible path.
269. ROG: Could I ask, maybe the airlines, Mr Wilson, you might comment on that.
270. EW: Willie makes the point on the longer term in terms of net zero, but in the absolute short term with the cap, and you take it down to a company level with Ryanair, we have 300 aircraft coming, the most fuel-efficient aircraft on the market, and they're going to go somewhere in Europe. The question is, are many of them going to come to Dublin? And if the cap is imposed, not only will there be no growth, but it will go backwards. So, you know, the climate debate can't be in a silo over Ireland. It's going to be, in the case of all this extra capacity that we're going to bring, it's just going to go elsewhere. And we're well aware of our commitments. And, you know, it's not all in terms of our climate credentials. And, you know, I'm not going to list them all here now. But what I can say is that, you know, this is the hub of economic activity like on an island and we're going to have to do something about that otherwise these aircraft are going to go, they're going to go elsewhere and we're going to export that to other, in the case of Ryanair, to other European countries. In the case of Aer Lingus, they lose their, they've less traction on their hub status and we're giving away all the good work that we've put in over the last number of years.

Deputy Cathal Crowe (Round 2)

271. CHAIR: Deputy Crowe and then Senator Cosgrove.
272. CC: Thanks, Chairman. Look, I want to go back to the points I was making earlier. I think we all recognise that this has to be lifted and the onus is on us here to politically expedite this, get it moving and the certain balances we have to do. And whilst this session may be frustrating for the industry, it's part of our legislative process. It has to come here before it goes up the chain and gets voted on ultimately.
273. CC: However, in the course of discussions, I think some of the commentary has been injurious to Ireland Inc., to our reputation. We pride ourselves as leaders in aviation. Aviation leasing is a huge presence here. We have some great airlines. We have some great routes. I want to go back to that point, and I'm very strong in feeling on this. I don't accept that there's been a violation. The cap is unworkable. It's undesirable. But Ireland as a country, Ireland as a government, hasn't failed here. There isn't a violation. And I go back to the point, Chairman, because it's an international country-to-country, government-to-government agreement. It's not airport-to-airport.
274. CC: And last winter, there were 40 airports in America, albeit for a short enough period, but there was a cap imposed on them. So, I mean, was that a violation? Or when Amsterdam Schiphol imposed environmental standards, which some of you may agree with, some of you may think it's nonsense, is that a violation? So, like, no court of law, the industry may feel that, and that's what your shareholders may feel, but no court of law has determined that. The Dutch model, to my understanding, unless something has happened in very recent times, that has been tested and that stands up to EU regulation. Mr Walsh, sorry. Well, please. Sorry, Mr Glatz.
275. KG: If I might, in fact, it is the Supreme Court in the Netherlands that struck down the air traffic decree that was proposed by both previous coalition governments. The European Union has also found on numerous occasions that they have not followed EU law. So, in fact, it is the position not only of the airline industry united at this table, but also of the legal system in the Netherlands and that of the European Commission that is the reason why the Dutch have not successfully been able to implement any of the proposals around these issues that they have continuously put out. And they've once again circled back on this and they will once again lose.
276. CC: By extension, and using some of the language that was used earlier in this session, was it a violation then for 40 US airports to be closed, sorry, to be capped to some extent last winter?
277. KG: I'm not familiar with what you're referring to.
278. CC: There was a temporary cap imposed on 40 US airports for a short period last winter.
279. WW: It was safety-related, so that wouldn't be a violation. The restrictions that were put in place were largely down to ATC issues, and you have this in different countries at different times.
280. CC: It was ATC and worker-related at the time?
281. WW: Yeah, it was principally air traffic.
282. CC: But the strict enforcement of slots as well at LaGuardia, JFK, Ronald Reagan Airport.
283. WW: Happens all the time.
284. CC: Just in the remaining time, I just want to ask both Aer Lingus and Ryanair, because at the end of the day I have to try to get elected down home. Can I ask, what are your plans for Shannon, for the Midwest? I know this dominates around Dublin Airport, but could you just give us a snippet about where you see things going in the Midwest? Because I think there's a lot to offer there. And thank you for what you're already operating in and out of that airport. Thank you.
285. EW: Yeah, I mean, we've given a growth plan to government, which is heavily weighted towards regional airports. In Shannon, we plan to grow to seven based aircraft and over four million passengers. And likewise, do the same, just slightly different, up to 4.5 million passengers in Cork. We'd open a base in Knock as well. So no other airline has invested in regional airports,

and Shannon's got that extra aircraft you've got. Sorry we can't do Amsterdam, but we have Madrid and Rome for you this year.

286. CC: Is there a timeline for some of that?

287. EW: Well, no, but that's with government now. We put an extra aircraft into Shannon this year. We've grown it. It's grown faster than Cork has grown. And they're doing a fantastic job down there because they're trying to remain...

288. CC: And is heavy maintenance back on the agenda?

289. EW: Potentially. Last week I was opening a new facility in Prestwick in Scotland and another one in Madrid earlier in the week. We are at an advanced stage of looking at an extension to the existing facility in Shannon.

290. LE: We do have to trade off where the aircraft go, but we've added new routes into Cork this year already for summer, and I'm really pleased that we were adding frequency, Shannon to New York, Shannon to Boston. That's been something we've been looking at for a while, and that's in for this year as well. So I want to just assure you that we have the regional airports on our radar. We look at all of the trade-offs when we're looking to allocate assets, and when it makes sense to do so, we put them into the regions.

291. CHAIR: Thank you, everyone. Thank you. Just to briefly ask you about Waterford. On the record, I'm from the South East, you know. Is there potential in Waterford?

292. WW: Limited.

293. CHAIR: Limited, yeah.

294. EW: Limited. We would talk to them, all right, but, I mean, it's proximity to Dublin and the road network, and it's halfway between there and Cork. But I wouldn't rule it out, but it would be very difficult. Okay, sorry. Thank you.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove

295. CHAIR: Senator Cosgrove.

296. SPEAKER_12: Sorry that I had to go in and out, but I suppose I just want to ask, because I've missed some there. I want to ask about, you know, like we all are, so we live particularly at the moment when the world is so catastrophic, and we are in the middle of a climate catastrophe, there's no doubt about this. I want to talk about emissions. Naturally, if there are fewer flights available, you're going to reduce emissions. We know that airline fuel is not, there's no carbon tax and there's no excise duty. I'd just like to know your thoughts on that. How would you feel about carbon tax being introduced and how would you really see that there's going to be net zero by 2050? Realistically, I can't see that happening. And would carbon tax on jet fuel impact that?

297. WW: So I believe it is possible for this industry to transition to net zero in 2050. As I've said, it's going to be challenging. It will be difficult. Through a number of actions, the principle will be the use of sustainable fuels. And sustainable fuels are reality. And when we say sustainable aviation fuel, the point should be made that sustainable fuels, a refinery producing sustainable fuels for aviation will provide sustainable fuels for other forms of transport and other industries that require it.

298. SPEAKER_12: This is biomass fuels, is it?

299. WW: It can be biomass and in the longer term it can be synthetic fuels.

300. SPEAKER_12: And when is that coming on stream? They're in today.

301. WW: We are using sustainable fuels today.

302. SPEAKER_12: Studies have been done, if there's actually going to be, you need the size of Tipperary to actually look at growing our own biomass fuels.

303. WW: But the opportunity for Ireland actually in the longer term is the production of sustainable fuels through the generation of renewable electricity from offshore wind, which I think represents a great opportunity for Ireland to produce an industry that will reduce Ireland's dependence on importing fuels.
304. SPEAKER_12: And where's the money going to come from for that? That's why I would like to say, would you be in favour of carbon tax on jet fuel that would directly contribute to the...
305. WW: I'm not in favour of carbon tax because I'll tell you why. Taxation is a blunt instrument that has proven to be completely ineffective. So if you as a politician want to introduce tax, let's be honest, what you will do is the aircraft that are flying today will continue to fly. They will fly with fewer people on the aircraft. You will price aviation out from the poorer in society. And if that's what you want, that's what you will get through that.
306. SPEAKER_12: How come everyone else, how come we all, we say particularly at the moment, fuel in all our households, in all other fuel, how come we all have to pay carbon tax?
307. EW: There is a carbon tax. It's one of the greatest fallacies ever. With the ETS scheme, this year this company will pay, Ryanair will pay, 1.5 billion, right, in carbon taxes, right?
308. SPEAKER_12: To who, though?
309. EW: No, no, no. On some routes, it would be in excess of 10 euros per passenger.
310. SPEAKER_12: And where's that going? Where's that carbon tax going?
311. EW: It goes to school buses here for a start, right? Because ETS is collected and then repatriated to government. And what did we do in Ireland? We put it into diesel pumping school bus systems, which should have been taken out of the education budget, instead of being reinvested into carbon-reducing initiatives. And you have this issue that we're all responsible, or this industry is primarily responsible for a climate catastrophe. We're not. This industry is responsible for about 2.8, between 2.5 and 2.8% of global emissions.
312. SPEAKER_12: 6% in Ireland, which you seem to be, and 85% of that is in Dublin Airport, though.
313. EW: We all live in the one atmosphere. So the aircraft, when we come down to what goes into Dublin Airport, is not going to make any difference to the climate, whether it goes into Dublin or whether it goes into Barcelona. But we do pay carbon, we pay rapacious carbon taxes at the moment and actually we let our friends here from A4A who we met this morning, who don't pay emissions trading coming in for various different reasons. The same with the Gulf carriers coming into Europe and we go around shooting ourselves.
314. SPEAKER_12: I suppose they're the lobbyist group. There are big companies I suppose that are opposed to carbon tax and I think that...
315. EW: No, hold on, I can't let you... We are paying 1.5 billion euros this year in carbon taxes.
316. SPEAKER_12: Is that under the European Union?
317. EW: There's taxes all over Europe, environmental taxes in different countries. Air passenger duty.
318. SPEAKER_12: In Ireland, though, I suppose part of the passenger... I suppose I live in the west of Ireland and I know that the cap was introduced in the first place was part of what was going to be balanced development. And I suppose what I would love to see, wasn't that part of the reason that was listed, that the cap was introduced, that there was going to be more regional development?
319. EW: It doesn't work that way. People seem to think this works in a binary way on some nationalistic agenda. It doesn't. Airlines make decisions on where to allocate capacity and we don't allocate capacity to the west of Ireland because there are aircraft that come into the west of Ireland, they start from Spain or start from England. It doesn't work that way.
320. SPEAKER_12: I suppose in fairness to Ryanair, we have options in the west of Ireland. I'd love to find out from Aer Lingus, are there options to expand more routes within the west of Ireland?

321. LE: Limited in where they exist, we take them. But I'd like to come back to your core point about the decarbonisation, because I think that's the debate that Ireland should be having. If we bring in carbon taxes, fuel taxes, that's just shooting Ireland in the foot again. But let me talk about the decarbonisation. Sustainable aviation fuel exists. We use it as IAG. We're one of the biggest users of it globally. And we believe in decarbonisation of this industry.
322. LE: So what Ireland should be doing is how do they get a huge slice of this industry as it develops? There's an opportunity for jobs. There's an opportunity for economic contribution as the future industry that doesn't yet exist, that takes the power and the ground away from the Middle East and the oil producing nations. That's what we need to get into. We need a national policy that develops sustainable aviation fuel that we all benefit from, that allows the connectivity that we will all need to enjoy, that supports the economy and brings benefit from participating in industry that is fledgling, but it exists. The technology is proven. It needs to grow at scale. That's where the debate should be.
323. SPEAKER_12: Could I ask you then to comment on the same thing from an American point, I suppose an airline point of view, international airline point of view?
324. CS: Absolutely. So I would argue, go to the core of your question and to the member's previous point of is 40 million the right number? Under your argument, zero would be the right number, right? If your argument is every additional airplane is a degradation to the environment, then theoretically I guess we should go to zero. Or is it 30 million? Or is it 50?
325. SPEAKER_12: Or are you going to use biomass fuels? Is there going to be a transition to actually having biomass fuels? Or pay the offset to it like every other country?
326. CS: So my members, above and beyond any carbon taxes, which as the other folks have testified here, are a blunt, lazy instrument in terms of promoting strong environmental changes, my members have put in billions of their own dollars of their own volition into the research, the development, the technology behind sustainable aviation fuels. The United States of America is the only place in the world that is going to have a certified eSAF fuel system coming online, the first one in the world. Not because of taxes, not because of government mandates, because the industry had the financial flexibility to make their own investments, knowing that they wanted to grow.
327. SPEAKER_12: Just for the good, is it? For the greater good to bring down global emissions?
328. CS: Oh, of course, that's always, yeah. But not just in the airline industry, in all the different industries.
329. SPEAKER_12: And you don't think carbon tax has anything to do with that?
330. CS: No, in fact, I would argue what you potentially do with reducing the number of flights here, when you look at the billions of dollars that would be pulled from your economy, as a former governor, I can tell you one of the best instruments wasn't taxes but subsidies. The ability for the government to help make investments, that all stops. That all comes to a grinding halt. No society that is pulling back on their economic growth can keep piling more opportunity financially into the environment. I was an environmental engineer from MIT. I did it for 12 years.
331. SPEAKER_12: But there is the argument, I suppose, and you've heard this from many people here, that the environmental or the economic impact, isn't seen as, from the Statistics Office, is there other external bodies or any other reports to show that economic activity has increased or has decreased since the cap was put in place? I know that has been discussed here already.
332. WW: The cap has not been implemented.
333. SPEAKER_12: I know that.
334. WW: But if you look at growth in GDP in Ireland or GNI or whichever you think is the appropriate measure, it pretty much mirrors the growth in passengers at Dublin Airport. So you could say Dublin Airport has grown because the economy has grown or you could say the economy has grown because Dublin Airport has grown. I think the two are completely interlinked.

335. CHAIR: Thank you. Deputy Toole.

Deputy Gillian Toole (Round 2)

336. GT: The learning from these opportunities are immeasurable in my opinion, so I'm grateful to be allowed to the committee. I'm not a member. I suppose I just, I'm getting great hope from what you said, Ms Embleton, so I do sincerely hope that that piece of communication from early in 2025 can be shared with the committee and then we can actually action that because I think that will be transformative.
337. GT: Continuing on my learning journey, Mr Wilson, you were speaking about new next-generation aircraft and being probably 50% quieter. Now, I have an engineering friend with aeronautical expertise, so I just, again, so I'm clear, so that my learning from this opportunity is beneficial and it's accurate.
338. GT: So engine test lab shows a three decibel reduction in acoustic energy. And then if you take that, the human needs a 10 decibel reduction to perceive sound being half as loud. So, God forbid the correspondence can't come to the committee, and the flight path, the five nautical miles straight out off the north runway, isn't implemented by Ryanair and Aer Lingus, then the next generation aircraft and the quietness is relevant to the community that I represent.
339. GT: So if you're on the ground around Coolquay, Kilcoskan, et cetera, currently measurements are around 81 decibels. And the target for night time for Lnight would be 45 decibels. And the health impacts I've already referenced. So is it 50% or is it actually just 19% is the reduction for the quieter aircraft?
340. EW: The quieter aircraft, based on the different fleets we've had with Boeing, from 200s to 800s to now the MAX 10s, there's a 50% reduction on a per-passenger basis. I sympathise with you in terms of who you represent, but no matter what way you go out of the airport, you've got to fly over somebody's house. I'm not being smart about that, that's the reality of it.
341. EW: We've done our own noise surveys, where, you know, you have, I think, an ambient level of noise is like 50 decibels, and I think a sort of a washing machine or something is somewhere around 65 decibels. And, you know, once the aircraft get above, even when they're flying overhead some of these communities directly over them, it doesn't go above 53 or 54 decibels. That's the information that I have. But that's a consequence of living near an airport. And I'm not being trite about that. That's it. There isn't a way of solving this. And if people don't like airplanes, if you live near an airport, you're going to have that interference.
342. GT: Oh, absolutely. And I would concur with you entirely. I would always be solution-focused. I worked for an excellent guy, Roy McCabe, McCabe's Pharmacies. My background is healthcare. And come with the problem, but for God's sake, don't come without the solution.
343. GT: And the solution here, and it's quite simple, and I know in the bigger scheme of things, this may not seem important, and particularly to our US representatives. But from a community perspective and getting that balance and meeting your sustainability targets, it's a very simple thing, but it is the removal of a logjam. And then all of the other points are taken on board, the increase in the use of SAF, the quieter aircraft, et cetera, et cetera.
344. GT: But when the simple thing is adherence to a flight path, and you don't, music to my ears, you don't have objections, how do we move this simple thing forward? Because it actually will have a highly beneficial contributing effect to the passing of the bill. And sometimes it can be the simplest things, and communication, that piece of correspondence, if that's admissible, this could be a game changer. And I like to keep it simple, but I am very grateful to you for letting me in, not being a member of the committee. Thank you.
345. CHAIR: You're very welcome, Deputy Toole.

Chair: public interest vs profits, infrastructure, curfews

346. CHAIR: Just to come back maybe to Mr Wilson and Ms Embleton. You talk a lot about the public interest. Is it really about the public interest for you, or is this just about bigger profits for Ryanair and Aer Lingus at Dublin Airport?
347. EW: It's not unique to what's going on in Dublin. You come across this in airports in various different guises and at different states of maturity where people accept what's happening at their local airports. We recently opened, in the last two years, an airport in Calabria.
348. CHAIR: I'm not so sure if you're answering my question.
349. EW: No, I am. Because in that particular situation, the representatives and all the local population will carry us shoulder high through the streets because they haven't been able to fly anywhere because their own government hasn't put in any infrastructure. And you do get to different maturities in different airports where people don't want the connectivity, want to go on their holidays, and don't want airplanes to fly. In an urban environment, that's what happens. So we look primarily at the demand that we have and the wider strategic issues of cost, etc., to make a return on our business. It's as simple as that and we have to deal with issues like this.
350. CHAIR: Is it about the public interest for Aer Lingus or is it about profits for Aer Lingus?
351. LE: Aer Lingus is part of IAG. IAG is a very successful airline group and we are battling for aircraft so they have more choices than you can imagine about where to put airplanes and make profits. So I'm passionate about Ireland. I'm passionate about Aer Lingus. I want Aer Lingus to grow. But from a profit perspective, there's plenty of other places. There's a shortage of aircraft in the world. There's a shortage of engines in the world. Plenty of other places airline groups can put aircraft. So this is 100%, this is in Ireland's hands to support the economy, to support jobs, to keep connectivity. This issue is critical. This is about national interest. This isn't about airline profits.
352. CHAIR: Can I just come back to the question around infrastructure? We have a planning application before Fingal County Council at the moment. I know it deals with a cap as well, but there's a lot of new infrastructure within that application. In terms of lifting the cap, that planning application won't be delivered for 2027 at the earliest. In terms of delivering the infrastructure within that particular application, we're looking at the existing infrastructure, related to the potential passenger growth between now and 2030. Can I just ask you to comment on that in terms of infrastructural deficit, that point I was making earlier on around wastewater, other areas?
353. EW: They haven't published it. They haven't published the detail of what's in their capital expenditure program. We're waiting to see that because there's a consultation process that's a bit of a sham if the airport doesn't actually produce the detail.
354. CHAIR: But notwithstanding what's in that, have you any concerns about infrastructure, existing infrastructure within Dublin Airport, the lifting of the cap, the potential passenger growth between now and 2030, and the existing infrastructure provision at Dublin Airport? Any concerns?
355. EW: From our point of view, from Ryanair's point of view, I think there is only a marginal amount of infrastructure that we would look for. But the existing infrastructure could be used, we believe, in a much more efficient way. It does need to grow, but we would have a strong view of what that looks like.
356. LE: The growth in the capacity shouldn't be influenced by an artificial cap. The infrastructure can take more passengers. Over time, we will need more infrastructure. There's a plan that hasn't yet been enacted that's been in place for several years. So we will need more stands over time. We will need more infrastructure over time. But that's normal life for an airport. And the airport will develop and capacity will be released according to the stands and the ability of the airport. It shouldn't be constrained by an artificial cap. The cap should go and then normal business should resume between airport and airport growth.
357. CHAIR: Just another question. I was on an aircraft, I was on the runway in Frankfurt, it was

probably 10 or half 10 recently, couldn't take off back, had to stay the night. There's a curfew at certain, many European airports, and we don't have a curfew. I suppose the question I'm asking now, if there was a curfew in terms of taking off after 11 or 12 o'clock in Dublin Airport and landing before 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning, is that going to affect passenger growth? And do such curfews exist across Europe? Certainly in Frankfurt. I couldn't take off recently at 10 or 11 o'clock in Frankfurt.

358. CS: I also represent cargo, and that's a big time for cargo. So FedEx, UPS, Atlas, bringing all the healthcare and supplies and commercial goods in, that's a key point for them.
359. CHAIR: Can I just ask the representative of ACI Europe? There are curfews at many European airports after certain times at night.
360. MSG: There are curfews at a handful of European airports. Frankfurt happens to be one of the most notable. And remembering the level of measures which you go down, an operating restriction would be the last place you would go. You should start thinking about land use planning.
361. WW: And also in some places the curfews can be set aside. So Heathrow, for example, but in times of... So there's no common approach being adopted by airports. And under the balanced approach...
362. DM: Exactly that point. Under the balanced approach, we don't believe a curfew is required in Dublin Airport. There was a noise quota system established to give essentially an envelope of noise within which airlines must comply. That has been complicated by An Coimisiun Pleanala's decision to add an overarching cap on top of that in terms of movements. The European Commission has determined that that didn't follow the balanced approach, so An Coimisiun Pleanala have to re-look at that. So a curfew isn't the appropriate approach.
363. CHAIR: Just because I'm asking the question, it's not necessarily that I'm advocating it. It's my job just to scrutinise and look at everything.

Closing Statements

364. CHAIR: So rather than me doing a long-winded closing statement, I want to give each witness maybe the opportunity just to do a two-minute wrap-up in terms of what we've heard, what we've discussed today, and your position with regard to the lifting of the cap. And I might go in reverse order, maybe just a minute or two, just some concluding comments, Mr Wilson.
365. EW: Yeah, I think while there are concerns on noise, it has become conflated, and it's not something that you hear wherever there's an airport, you hear this, but it's become conflated with the cap. It's very simple. The cap has to be lifted. You can see what's going to happen with growth at Dublin Airport. It's very easy to do. 16 months on, the government haven't done anything about this. There's been emergency legislation in this country before for lots of things going back to the banking crisis, I remember Insurance Corporation, all sorts of things done at night, and that's what's required here. And it is disastrous for this country if we don't get that lifted. In our case, all the growth that we have from an Irish-based airline will go elsewhere in Europe. And you know, the cap, the cap needs to be lifted.
366. CHAIR: Just have regard, are there a couple of crucial dates here in the context of the timing of this? So we're doing pre-legislative scrutiny, we're meeting twice a week to try and fast-track the PLS. I think we talked about the first of October in the context of looking at the 2027 slots? The slot allocation. And I'm conscious as well that we're still waiting for the formal decision of the European Court as well. And does that have a bearing for other European matters as well? And if you could factor that into your closing comments.
367. WW: Yeah, just to say thank you for the opportunity. We believe that this legislation is critical. The timing of it is also critical because of the timeframe that we're looking at in terms of decision-making that airlines are looking at. And if no decision is taken, the assumption will be that the cap will be introduced, which will mean airlines will remove assets from Dublin Airport and those assets may never come back. So this is a significant risk to both Dublin and, I believe, the Irish

economy. And the timing is absolutely critical to get clarity around what's going to happen as soon as possible, but certainly September is probably the very latest that we could see this legislation being enacted and in place.

368. CS: And again, I would just say thank you because I do hear that you are looking to move quickly. And that was one of the biggest issues, not just for the airlines we represent, but the partners that we have here in Europe in terms of just making it happen quickly. And I do want to just be super clear, we are just as concerned about these retaliatory or rebalancing effects that would potentially happen. We're as concerned as anybody. We are not in favour of it, my God, it would be devastating. If anything, my hope was, when I go back across the pond as they say, to bring some good news. And I think I can, that you're taking it seriously, moving quickly.
369. CS: As it pertains to the court, my understanding is this quick legislative action would effectively nullify what the court says. It really would supersede and say, look, we're going forward. We're going to take this cap off. It would allow our carriers and probably every carrier in the world to plan into that 2027 season and that slot analysis with some confidence as opposed to constricting potentially and moving what they might do. Again, we're trying to bring back as strong of a message as we can. I very much appreciate everyone's work. It's not easy. I know the passenger cap started with traffic, but now it allows all these other issues to come into play. A lot of consideration of all those folks now that live nearby those airports.
370. MSG: Thank you as well for the opportunity. It's two points and both of them a bit of a story. The first is, some of your questions about who profits, and ACI, the airports, most of them aren't profit entities, so we try and align with the interests of community. One thing that didn't come up is this isn't just about airport employees, airline employees, ground handling. It's also about the Irish economy, and to make that real and the value of the hub, I hope we can put this in writing for the deputies who are here.
371. MSG: I have Belgian and American passports. I connected via Dublin to go to Minneapolis last summer. Thanks for that flight, Ms Embleton. That flight was mostly full of people working in the medical device industry, working for Minneapolis-based firms with operations in Ireland. Those firms will not expand in Ireland if they cannot have that direct flight. So this is about the Irish people. What are Ireland's exports now? 21% vaccines and serums, 11% nucleoids and their salts. I have no idea what that is. 6% hormones. This is Ireland's economy. So we're not talking about the aviation industry. We are talking about what the hub can offer for the people of Ireland across the island working in industries like pharmaceuticals.
372. MSG: And my second story, I have seven seconds, I'll be quick. I bought a sandwich on the Ryanair flight yesterday. It expires on the 27th of November, chicken mozzarella. I ate it right then, but that sandwich has a longer lifetime than this committee and the Irish Houses have to act to meet what we heard from Mr Walsh about ensuring airlines plan correctly for the slots they hold today.
373. CHAIR: And just on that, is the critical date the 1st of October, or does that planning start before, and is the decision made on the 1st of October?
374. WW: Decision is made on the 1st of October, planning starts before it. The Dublin decision in terms of the slot allocation is the 1st of October. But the airlines are planning now.
375. CHAIR: Yeah. And final word then to Ms Embleton.
376. LE: First thing is you can't rely on the European Court. You can't rely on the planning permission that the DAA has come in. That's all happening too late. So we need the legislation actually enacted before October because we are on the brink of cancelled trips, higher fares, lost jobs, economic harm. And so we urge the government, we urge this committee to support the very fast enactment of the legislation.
377. DM: Just one comment to expand on that. It's not just the legislation enacted, it's commenced and the ministerial order under the legislation being issued before the 1st of October.

Closing by Chair

378. CHAIR: I just want to conclude by thanking all our witnesses for today, for your engagement and not just today in the context of your detailed submissions as well. I think as part of this process we've received close to 150 submissions. While most people were celebrating St Patrick's Day, I was reading submissions, the average length of which was 50 pages each, with the exception of the airlines, which was between three and five pages.
379. CHAIR: I just want to thank the members who have now since left, but Deputy Toole that has remained. Just to thank individuals in the public gallery as well. We have a recess next week, but we've two meetings scheduled the following week to conclude. We're going to meet a number of key business organisations, a number of key tourism organisations, a number of NGOs as well and thereafter conclude our report in terms of the proposed legislation. So thank you all.
380. CHAIR: The meeting now stands adjourned until Tuesday the 14th of April when we meet at 6pm again in public session. Thank you all.