

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM IOMPAR JOINT COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT

Dé Céadaoin, 25 Márta 2026

Wednesday, 25 March 2026

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 9.30 a.m.

The Joint Committee met at 9.30 a.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Grace Boland,	Lorraine Clifford-Lee,
Michael Collins,	Nessa Cosgrove.
Cathal Crowe,	
Ann Graves,*	
Roderic O'Gorman.	

* In éagmais / In the absence of Deputy Pa Daly.

I láthair / In attendance: Deputy Gillian Toole and Senator Manus Boyle.

Teachta / Deputy Michael Murphy sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

General Scheme of the Dublin Airport (Passenger Capacity) Bill 2026: Discussion (Resumed)

An Cathaoirleach: I want to confirm that Deputy Ann Graves will substitute for Deputy Pa Daly and Deputy Louis O'Hara has notified me that Deputy Louise O'Reilly will substitute for him. No apologies have been brought to my attention.

The purpose of today's meeting is to continue our pre-legislative scrutiny of the general scheme of the 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, trade, inward investment jobs and, indeed, international connectivity.

Today, we will hear from airline and airport interests. On behalf of the committee, I am delighted to welcome from Aer Lingus, Ms Lynne Embleton, chief executive officer, and 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 Mr. Morgan Foulkes, deputy director; from Airlines for America, Mr. Chris Sununu, president and CEO, and Mr. Keith Glatz, senior vice president, international affairs; from the 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. Last, I acknowledge the apologies that we have formally received from Mr. Michael O'Leary due to a bereavement and we offer our condolences.

I will address some notes on privilege for our witnesses. Witnesses are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable, or otherwise engage in speech that might be regarded as damaging to the good name of that person or entity. Therefore, if their statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks and it is imperative that they comply with any such direction.

Members of the committee are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside of the Houses or an official, either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I now call the witnesses to make their statements in the following order. We will begin with Aer Lingus, followed by Airports Council International Europe, Airlines for America, the International Air Transport Association and, last but not least, Ryanair. I invite Ms Embleton to make her opening statement on behalf of Aer Lingus. She has five minutes, if that is okay. We might keep the opening statements to five minutes, please.

Ms Lynne Embleton: Yes, absolutely. I thank the Chair and members of the committee for the invitation to appear before them today. As the Chair has said, aviation is uniquely critical to Ireland as a small, open, island economy. Dublin Airport is not just a transport facility; it is

strategic national infrastructure. It underpins Ireland's international connectivity, tourism, trade and foreign direct investment, and it supports employment across every region of the country. It is a key enabler of the Irish economy.

Aer Lingus 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 of them based at Dublin, and we operate long-haul, short-haul and a UK network. Importantly, Dublin Airport functions as a hub airport. It connects Ireland, the UK and Europe with North America. This is fully aligned with the objectives of the national aviation policy.

Against that backdrop, the existing passenger cap is an 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, which is over 12% of the current traffic. That would have a catastrophic impact on connectivity, the airport and the wider Irish economy. 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.

Aer Lingus commissioned independent economic analysis which concluded that if the passenger cap were to be enforced and resulted in a reduction in passenger numbers, every 1 million passengers lost due to the cap would equate to approximately €1.4 billion in lost direct, indirect and induced expenditure, over €320 million in lost Exchequer revenues and up to 37,000 lost jobs. These are not abstract figures; they reflect potential lost jobs and routes, reduced connectivity, constrained tourism, forgone investment and reduced competitiveness relative to peer economies. 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.

The timing is absolutely critical. While the 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. Any delay materially risks the enforcement of capacity reductions. This risk is particularly acute in respect of summer 2027. To date, severe cuts on seat capacity at Dublin by the Irish Aviation Authority, IAA, have been avoided only because of legal proceedings initiated by 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.

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, which is due in early October of this year, then there is a real risk of very significant capacity cuts for summer 2027. Planning decisions by Fingal County Council that relate to the Dublin Airport Authority, DAA, infrastructure application, which include an application to raise the passenger cap, will not be concluded in time to prevent that outcome. 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 said, is due in October. Swift enactment and 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 safeguarding Ireland's international connectivity, economic strength and resilience and long-term competitiveness.

Mr. Michael Stanton-Geddes: I thank the Chair and members of the committee for this opportunity to share the views of Airports Council International, 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. This morning, I will 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 it can be done in a way that correctly considers the people and communities around the airport. 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 broadly reaffirmed the axiom that increasing air connectivity, however you measure that, increases wealth, GDP and other economic productivity measures.

There is a misconception, however, that this growth is not equal across regions. It is a common belief that the growth of the hub could stunt regional airports' growth, and that is not right. There has 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 km and 200 km - growth at the hub happens at the same time as traffic growth at regional airports. Increasing the passenger cap at Dublin will have positive catalytic impacts across the Irish economy, which will support connectivity developments at all airports.

Second, 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 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, down from its position at 17th in 2019. Dublin lost one spot on the hub connectivity ranking while airports like Athens have seen their ranking jump by ten positions, with Copenhagen plus five, Gatwick plus four and Milan-Malpensa plus seven.

To be sure, Dublin Airport has done well but the capacity cap is just now constraining activity. There are signals that this hub connectivity is at risk. When we look at the rate of increase or the percentage 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. That is a cause for concern.

A real concern is that capacity caps can have serious consequences if they push 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 and 2025 as Air France consolidated its hub operations at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport.

Stepping back, at a European level, the report on European competitiveness by Mario Draghi made it clear that transport and aviation are enablers of competitiveness and of industrial and societal integration. If we look at the past ten years of aviation policy across Europe, in the EU member states the focus has been exclusively on negative externalities. It has been done in a way that is compromising our positive benefits. This is in sharp contrast to what is happening in the rest of the world.

To the west, New York's JFK is rebuilding itself entirely with two massive new terminals. To the east, the UK is expanding its London airports and Poland is building a new Port Polska hub. There is expansion across the map. Further afield, Dubai is expanding Al Maktoum into a massive passenger airport, with plans to shape future aviation centrality. In India and China, airports are popping up like mushrooms after the rain.

It is good that we can sit down in this room together and engage to discuss the social good created by European airports. Based on what we see across Europe, ACI Europe urges the committee to allow Dublin Airport to serve its community by passing the Bill to remove the passenger cap.

Mr. Chris Sununu: I thank the committee for the opportunity to be here. To be clear at the outset, the passenger cap at Dublin Airport is no longer a planning constraint. It is now a policy decision that, if left in place, would be an economic disaster for the citizens of Ireland. It must be removed. We are not talking about 2027 or later this autumn. It has to be removed immediately. Dublin is Ireland's primary international gateway - a critical link between the United States and Europe. As an island, air connectivity is critical to every aspect of Ireland's economy. That connection underpins tourism, trade and all the foreign direct investment that has come in. Dublin Airport contributes approximately \$10 billion annually to the Irish economy and supports more than 100,000 jobs. Constraining that connectivity is no small matter. It carries national consequences. The maths are clear. Enforcing the passenger cap would cost the Irish economy between \$6 billion and \$10 billion in lost direct economic activity. That equates to more than half of the tourism spending in Ireland. This is not just about stopping flights at the airport. The cap stands to stop the growth of Ireland's economy.

It also raises a fundamental issue on alignment with 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, violates that commitment. It was not designed and should not be applied as an aviation tool. The US has over 160 bilateral air services agreements in place all over the world. Whenever there is a disparate treatment of that partnership, retaliation and rebalancing can be expected.

Airlines are making decisions now about where to deploy aircraft, open routes and invest for the next several years. Those decisions depend on confidence in that market access. Where that confidence is lacking, aircraft, capital and growth move, and those decisions are not easily reversed. 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 legislative action by the Oireachtas can do that.

Today, the United States is watching very closely to see what Ireland's next steps will be. This issue is now before the United States Government. I am not here to speak on its behalf, but we can be clear about how these situations are viewed. When market access for US carriers appears constrained in ways that conflict with international agreements, it triggers a response. I was at the White House last week discussing this issue. I was at the US Department of Transportation on Monday discussing this issue and I am here today. With all the craziness going on in the United States with aviation, this is our priority. This is where folks are watching.

The Government and airlines are going to be making decisions very soon based on the response or non-response of this body. Not acting quickly introduces risk, not only for US carriers operating in Ireland, but for Irish carriers' access to the United States. It means routes, frequencies, and future growth are all dependent on policy decisions made here. The passenger cap is a direct threat to one of the world's best partnerships.

It is in everyone's interest to see the US-Ireland relationship grow. The great news is this: the body has the opportunity today to send a clear signal that Dublin remains open to growth, investment and competition, a clear message to Ireland's citizens that it prioritises their jobs and economic success and all of the opportunity this triggers for their families, and a clear message to the US Government that Ireland respects and values our long-standing agreement specifically as it pertains to airlines in the US open skies agreements. The field is very much set for Ireland's success, and we hope that Ireland will take the win.

Mr. Willie Walsh: I thank 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 the committee has heard, Ireland's aviation sector is not simply an important industry; it is a strategic national asset. Air connectivity underpins Ireland's role as a global, outwardlooking economy. It enables trade, tourism and 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.

Aviation contributes more than \$20 billion to Ireland's GDP and supports approximately 128,000 jobs, with air-enabled tourism generating a further \$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 not in Ireland for future growth - decisions that may become permanent.

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.

Timing is critical to remove the current uncertainty. Airlines have already begun planning for the summer of 2027 and 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 and, 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.

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. The Bill gives the 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 realities of global aviation and protects its role in international air transport. I thank members and look forward to their questions.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: Ryanair is the largest airline in the world for international passengers. It is the largest airline in Europe. 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 are going to take delivery of 300 aircraft over the next seven years. The question is, where are they going to go? With the cap as it is at the moment and that uncertainty, those aircraft cannot be allocated to Dublin, but they are coming to Europe or north Africa. The programme for Government from 16 months ago promised to remove this unlawful cap but nothing has happened.

Even though the noise issue that was addressed with the committee yesterday is not part of the cap, it would be remiss of me not to address that. Dublin Airport has been there since 1940. Local issues cannot take over the growth of a national strategic asset. The noise surveys that we have undertaken show that even with jets flying over places like St. Margaret's and Ballyboughal in north County Dublin and Ashbourne are just marginally over 50 decibels, which is well within the safe zone.

The Dublin Airport passenger cap relates to planning issues. Those planning issues from back in 2007 have been addressed with the road network and bus connectivity. The second runway was put in place in 2016, which gives us the ability to get to at least 50 million or 60 million passengers. This cap sits there at 32 million. We are planning now. Everybody is saying that here today. It is contrary to the US open skies agreement. Dublin Airport can and must grow. It is not a question of whether those aircraft will go to other parts of Ireland. Airports right across Europe and the world are building capacity. Rome is set to grow to 100 million passengers. Aena in Spain is set to grow huge hubs in Madrid and Barcelona. In London, Stansted is set to grow to 52 million passengers. Gatwick has strategic initiatives. They are not subject to local planning conditions at all and we need to learn a lesson from that.

Ryanair has a national plan to grow our passenger numbers here from 23 million to 35 million. Over 50% of that would come to Dublin and the balance would go to regional airports, where we have grown spectacularly post Covid. We have almost doubled traffic in Shannon

and Cork since Covid. We have the aircraft and the people. We can create up to 10,000 jobs on site at Dublin but that is all dependent on this cap being abolished. As we just heard there, it needs to be done now. We are planning and those aircraft will be allocated elsewhere. There are all the implications for intercontinental travel and connectivity to this country. The Government has failed to deliver on its promises and it needs to do this now. It is of national importance. We are making those decisions. I have 96 places where I can allocate aircraft right across Europe and north Africa and we are making those decisions now. We need this cap scrapped immediately.

I would welcome any questions.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. Wilson and all the witnesses for their opening statements and the detailed submissions they made in advance of these hearings. It is safe to say that all of the witnesses are closely aligned, with perhaps some differences in emphasis and tone. All have called for swift legislative action to remove the cap and align with Irish law and international aviation obligations.

We now move to questions from members. I propose initially to allocate eight minutes per member and if we have time, we will do a two- or three-minute follow-up towards the end of the meeting. Bearing in mind that we have five witnesses representing five organisations before us, I ask members to direct their questions to a particular witness. I first call Senator Lorraine Clifford Lee.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: I thank the witnesses for coming before us today to discuss this very important matter. Even though I have just entered the committee room, I was following the conversation online. I listened to what the witnesses said very closely.

I direct my first question to Aer Lingus and Ryanair. All the residents living around Dublin Airport have expressed to me their support for connectivity and their support for the airport, but the good neighbour principle is not being adhered to, particularly with the flight path that is being undertaken by a number of airlines currently. Areas and communities that were never previously under a flight path are now under a flight path. Can the airlines address this in a proper and meaningful way so that we can proceed and develop the airport as we all want?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: Flight paths are set by AirNav. The plans set out how airlines can safely depart and arrive. If people do not like aeroplanes, they have a choice as to whether they want to live beside an airport. We do not have a choice-----

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: I would put it to Mr. Wilson that many of the-----

Mr. Eddie Wilson: I did not interrupt the Senator. What we did not-----

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: I am a member of the committee and I am limited in time. I want to put a question to Mr. Wilson. People living near the airport have lived there for generations, long before Dublin Airport was there, and they deserve a bit of respect. I ask Mr. Wilson to withdraw the accusation of NIMBYism from the people living around Dublin Airport on behalf of the company.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: I will not withdraw it at all because it is actually accurate. Aeroplanes take off. When the pilot lines up on the runway, they have a flight plan that is set down by AirNav and the flight corridors. It is not a question of wanting to be a good neighbour or not.

That is how planes take off from an airport. The question then is what the noise implications of that are. The noise implications of that, from surveys we have completed, are that when aircraft take off, it is well within the safe decibel level. We have to look at what has happened with aircraft. I joined Ryanair 29 years ago and the aircraft are 50% quieter now.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: I am not talking about the noise. Currently, aeroplanes from all airlines are not following the correct flight path and communities in Ballyboughal, Oldtown, Ashbourne, Rolestown and beyond are suddenly finding they are living under-----

Mr. Eddie Wilson: With respect, that is not true.

Ms Lynne Embleton: May I come in at this point? As the Senator will understand, we have to follow the designated flight path for safety reasons. Aer Lingus is 100% compliant with the standard instrument departure flight path. If that flight path needs to change, that is a question for AirNav and the airport, but the airlines have to comply, and we comply 100%.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: Is Ms Embleton denying that communities are suffering serious issues?

Ms Lynne Embleton: I am simply saying that it is the airlines' responsibility to fly safely, and to fly safely means we have to follow the flight path. That is what we do every time.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: Can airlines not find different technical solutions that would assist the many communities that have raised issues since the opening of the northern runway?

Ms Lynne Embleton: I know the committee has heard from the DAA and the IAA. It is their role to dictate the flight paths that the airlines follow. We have a safety commitment to follow those flight paths.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: The planning permission that was granted for the northern runway is not being adhered to by airlines. There are technical solutions and-----

Ms Lynne Embleton: We have to follow the standard instrument departures we are given by air traffic control and AirNav.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: Is Ms Embleton happy that her airline is adhering to the good-neighbour principle?

Ms Lynne Embleton: I am happy that my airline is safe because we are following the designated take-off paths. If they change, we will follow the new designated take-off paths. It is not within the airlines' power or discretion to take off in any direction we want.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: Is Ms Embleton happy that her airline is adhering to the good-neighbour principle?

Ms Lynne Embleton: I am happy that we are operating safely. We have to operate within a system. There are other players within the system and I know they appeared before and spoke to the committee. I acknowledge that noise matters and that this is an issue for the community, but the solution does not sit with the airlines. The solution sits with the system that instructs the airlines where and how to fly. We will comply with that completely, but it is not in our power to change that.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: Is the representative from Ryanair happy that his airline is operating within the good-neighbour principle?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: I do not know what a good-neighbour principle is as it is laid down. Slots are allocated to us. At a micro level, it comes down to aircraft lining up for take-off and they do not have any discretion. They have those standard instrument departures-----

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: Clearly the aeroplanes are flying since the northern runway opened in 2022----

Mr. Eddie Wilson: Clearly, they are. We do not have any level of discretion-----

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: -----on a different route that was not within the planning permission.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: Sorry, Senator-----

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: It is clear. Thousands of people across-----

Mr. Eddie Wilson: There is zero discretion to do that. The Senator can say what she said three times if she likes but there is no discretion. Mr. Walsh is a former pilot and I am sure he will be able to tell the Senator the position.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: Many people here, including me, have met people from the communities who never before thought their houses would be under a flight path. People who got planning permission from Fingal County Council did their due diligence and were aware of the planning permission for the northern runway, so there is clearly a disconnect. I am not going to get any satisfaction from the witnesses on the good neighbour principle. We are talking about communities that support the airport and want it to be successful, but what they require is not being done on the witnesses' side. I will leave it at that.

Deputy Grace Boland: The witnesses are very welcome.

I am supportive of lifting the airport cap but there are a number of local and infrastructural challenges that need to be addressed. Could Mr. Walsh state whether airlines have any input into the flight paths, or into the SIDs?

Mr. Willie Walsh: Generally, no. As a former airline pilot, let me reiterate what was said. Pretty much every airport has SIDs for each runway it uses. There is an arrival system as well. There is no discretion in terms of-----

Deputy Grace Boland: I appreciate that.

Mr. Willie Walsh: The only time there is discretion is in the event of, say, a risk to safety, when it is possible to deviate. However, there is generally no discretion.

Deputy Grace Boland: So, airlines do not have any influence over or input into flight paths. Is it fully within the purview of DAA and AirNav Ireland?

Mr. Willie Walsh: Yes.

Deputy Grace Boland: Is there any truth to the rumour that planes that take a sharp right turn over Fingal and Meath after taking off are actually saving fuel and money?

Mr. Willie Walsh: All airlines at Dublin Airport are compliant with the SIDs. They have to follow that. Therefore, they have no discretion.

Deputy Grace Boland: I am asking the question, in the appropriate forum, of whether there is any truth to it. I do not know.

Mr. Willie Walsh: No, there is no truth to it. Airlines and pilots are required to follow the SIDs.

Deputy Grace Boland: I assume, because airlines do not have any input into or influence over the flight paths, there would be no objection if DAA and AirNav Ireland changed them.

Mr. Willie Walsh: None whatsoever. That is the reality. Flight paths or instruments of departure change from time to time. They are amended and new ones are introduced. It is not unusual. The flight paths are published and the airline is required to ensure they are followed. Pilots are required to ensure that, when flying aircraft, they follow the prescribed SIDs.

Ms Lynne Embleton: May I add to that? Aer Lingus has offered the use of its simulator to the DAA, the IAA and AirNav Ireland so they can consider alternative flight paths around the airport.

Deputy Grace Boland: Have they taken Aer Lingus up on that?

Ms Lynne Embleton: Yes.

Deputy Grace Boland: The airport cap has been in place since 2007. Have all the airlines been raising this as an issue with the DAA? When did Aer Lingus first start to raise this as an issue the DAA needed to address?

Ms Lynne Embleton: The first time we raised the issue of the passenger cap being addressed?

Deputy Grace Boland: Yes, as in the need to have it lifted.

Ms Lynne Embleton: It was in 2012, based on my recollection.

Mr. Donal Moriarty: I believe we wrote to the DAA in 2012 flagging our concerns about the passenger cap and the urgency of resolving the matter. It was 14 years ago.

Deputy Grace Boland: Is there any sense as to why there was a delay, or why the planning application went in only a couple of years ago?

Mr. Donal Moriarty: I am sure the DAA was in and gave a timeline as to the various events that-----

Deputy Grace Boland: It did. Several years elapsed. It was 2018 or 2019 before it started.

Mr. Donal Moriarty: Our view is that it was not addressed quickly enough in terms of planning applications. Even the planning application made in 2024 related to infrastructure that had been designed under the capital investment programme in 2018. Therefore, it took six years from the defining of the infrastructure required for Dublin Airport to submit the planning application.

Deputy Grace Boland: Was it out of date by the time it was submitted?

Mr. Donal Moriarty: No, there have been inordinate delays over many years in dealing with infrastructure applications, planning applications and, obviously, the passenger cap.

Deputy Grace Boland: What I mean is that it was submitted only in 2024 on the basis of the data from 2018. Had the data become out of date? Was the planning application appropriate for-----

Mr. Donal Moriarty: The passenger number last year was over 36 million, so the assumptions made by Dublin Airport with respect to passenger growth, particularly after Covid, were incorrect.

Deputy Grace Boland: Could Mr. Wilson state when Ryanair first started to raise the issue of the airport cap with the DAA?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: I do not know the exact date but it was certainly prior to the Covid pandemic. The time to address this was during the pandemic. It should have been done when the second runway was opened. We saw some of the internal planning issues in that regard. It should have been done long ago.

Deputy Grace Boland: I thank Mr. Wilson. I am conscious of time.

When did Airlines for America start to raise the issue of the cap with the DAA?

Mr. Chris Sununu: It was around the time of Covid, when the second runway was developed. That is when it became heightened and people understood there would be a huge constraint coming down the road.

Deputy Grace Boland: So, Aer Lingus raised it in 2012 and the others raised it sometime after that.

Could I ask Mr. Stanton-Geddes about night-time hours and night-time restrictions? What is the standard across the main European airports? What measures are other airports taking to address noise and environmental concerns, particularly those related to early-morning and late-night departures?

Mr. Michael Stanton-Geddes: I have a colleague online who will be able to take this question. On the first point, I will reiterate what was said earlier: the passenger cap of 32 million is a planning issue; it is not about noise. Noise should be dealt with separately.

Deputy Grace Boland: I appreciate that but in having this conversation we do have to take into account the fact that residents in the community have come up decibel levels that are very different from those offered here by Mr. Wilson. Therefore, it is a matter in which I, as a TD for the communities in the area where Dublin Airport is located, will be interested. I am aware that other airports in Europe are addressing noise issues and have imposed additional restrictions. I would like to hear that from Mr. Stanton-Geddes.

Mr. Michael Stanton-Geddes: That is correct. Mr. Foulkes, the deputy director, who is joining us online, will address the point on noise restrictions at airports.

Mr. Morgan Foulkes: I thank the Deputy for her question. At the larger airports in the centre of Europe, a number of steps have been taken with regard to noise. This is a topic on which airports have been very active in the past 40 years. The first types of restrictions were enacted

at the London airports in the 1980s and 1990s. Typically, the restrictions were on night flights and achieved through movement caps and quota count systems. There are different regimes in place at different airports. There can be a movement cap, in particular at night. We have night restrictions or curfews. There can be restrictions concerning the types of aircraft that can be operated and there can be-----

Deputy Grace Boland: I thank Mr. Foulkes for that. I have only 29 seconds left. Would all the airlines commit to using quieter aeroplanes for departures early in the morning or very late at night if it helped to alleviate concerns? Yes or no? I have 13 seconds left.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: They are all quiet.

Deputy Grace Boland: We know that is not true. I am referring to using quieter ones.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: Having a hard rule on times and a quota count is not the way to go. Encouraging airlines to invest in quieter aircraft is the way to go. That is what happens elsewhere.

Deputy Grace Boland: What is Ms Embleton's view?

Ms Lynne Embleton: An aircraft has to fly for the entire day. With a successful aviation system generating the ability to drive profits and invest, we can invest in more quieter aircraft. The new aircraft are 50% quieter than the ones we replace. A healthy aviation system will solve this issue.

An Cathaoirleach: I will begin with Mr. Sununu. His submission and opening statement allude to potential retaliatory measures by the US. Based on precedent, what could those measures involve and what risks do they pose for Irish carriers?

Mr. Chris Sununu: There is very strong potential to lose flights to the US, including New York.

In case the Chair has not read the headlines, if he thinks the US Administration is going to have one of its bilateral agreements, which has been in place a long time, violated and just take it, that is not what these guys do. If we lose flights over here, you would likely lose flights over there. We have an amazing opportunity with the technologies we have put in to have the ability to go back and forth easily. That would all come to a screeching halt, make no mistake. Look at what happened in Canada. It was one of our best trading partners in the world. It stopped certifying our aeroplanes and the next day we stopped certifying theirs and it all came to a screeching halt. This is not an administration that-----

An Cathaoirleach: Mr. Sununu mentioned being in the White House last week. Are there active conversations ongoing at the moment between American airlines and the US Administration with regard to the restriction of the cap?

Mr. Chris Sununu: Yes.

An Cathaoirleach: Active conversations.

Mr. Chris Sununu: Active conversations this week, yes.

An Cathaoirleach: What kinds of conversation?

Mr. Chris Sununu: It is a reminder that the vast majority of the 160 bilateral agreements we have in place are adhered to. Everyone follows the rules really well. There are a couple of actors here and there. This is the number one issue I can point to where the US Administration has said this is a violation of the agreement. No country puts in more in terms of direct foreign investment into Ireland and no country puts more into relying on that partnership, but no country will take as immediate a retaliation as the United States probably would, and it could come in a variety of different means. That is a domino effect. It is not just be at the airport or the airlines. There are businesses saying that if they cannot get back and forth or if there is a massive cost to that, they will 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 for the entire foundation of Europe.

Who wants to see this passenger cap in place more than anyone? The Brits. Ireland will get a thank you note from the UK Government as soon as it keeps it in place because it loves it because all the planes will start going there. All the opportunity and all the money will go there. Do not let that happen.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. Sununu. I want to ask Mr. Walsh a question based on his experience as a pilot on the north runway and the 30 degree turn. Can he explain the operational necessity for that 30 degree turn and set out clearly why a straight-out departure profile cannot be flown as was originally envisaged?

Mr. Willie Walsh: Pilots will fly whatever is determined 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. Pilots are trained to fly them all. It is not a decision by the pilot or the airline. It will be a decision that is taken in other places. It will be directed to the airlines and they will follow it. As Ms Embleton has said, simulators are available to the authorities to practise and evaluate other departure routes. If the departure routes are changed, the airlines will fully comply with any published departure route.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. Walsh. I will ask Ms Embleton and Mr. Wilson whether any aircraft crew route plans already been diverted to other airports, given the uncertainty around the cap as it currently stands in Dublin Airport.

Ms Lynne Embleton: Not Aer Lingus crew and aircraft but we operate within a group. We fight for capital and 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. On the point made by my colleague in front of me, this is not an internal Irish issue. Rather, this is about Ireland getting investment or other countries benefiting. When we have the uncertainty of the passenger cap, it affects the appetite to commit not only to aircraft, but to pilots - there is a lead time on recruiting pilots and engineers - and to taking the risk on recruitment. This is not just about not having growth, but about the risk of capacity reduction, which is serious and needs to be considered by the committee. You do not invest in committing aircraft and the associated recruitment and training for pilots, engineers and so on with this level of uncertainty. Ireland has lost out in the sense that the aircraft within the group have gone elsewhere. Aer Lingus ourselves have not moved aircraft.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: The simple answer is "Yes". There are two aircraft. We have gone from 35 to 33 winter on winter already. It is anywhere we have uncertainty. We look at a

combination of factors. You obviously look at cost, whether it is an existing base and commercial performance as well as any degree of uncertainty. We have gone up by one aircraft in Shannon but we have gone down in Dublin with a combination of those factors. We would have had an additional 28 aircraft to allocate this winter.

An Cathaoirleach: There has been some discussion in the committee on the extent to which so much traffic is going through Dublin Airport, with 85% of all airline traffic going through Dublin Airport. We have heard a lot about the economic benefit and 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? I am thinking of a situation where there might be a critical incident at Dublin Airport and the impact that could have on the Irish economy. I am really asking about growth in regional airports. Witnesses mentioned Ryanair's growth in Cork and Shannon. I saw something online about Michael O'Leary in Knock. What factors determine that it is Dublin, Dublin, Dublin? Why not more investment and more growth at our regional airports, particularly Cork and Shannon?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: It is happening but it is demand-led. It is up to the airline whether it puts on the capacity. That is a combination of cost, level of certainty, etc. You cannot get people to go where they do not want to go. People choose.

An Cathaoirleach: Will Mr. Wilson just explain that?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: If you go on a website, there is a drop-down menu and if you want to go to Dublin, you go to Dublin. You will be pretty surprised if you land in Shannon. You cannot force people to go elsewhere. You cannot plan centrally in an open economy. People choose to go where they want to go.

An Cathaoirleach: Does Mr. Wilson not think it would be much easier for Tipperary people like myself to go to Cork or Shannon than to Dublin? We do not have that choice.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: The Chairman would be surprised what people would do or how far they would drive to an airport based on price.

An Cathaoirleach: Will Ms Embleton answer briefly, please? My time is up, unfortunately.

Ms Lynne Embleton: We will serve Cork and Shannon when there is 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. It is the 17th largest economy and we are now the second biggest across the Atlantic out of Europe because of the hub. You need to feed from Europe, gather up customers and send them to the US. You just will not have that. It is a hub dynamic.

An Cathaoirleach: If I may give an example, I spent ten years in Brussels and could never understand why there was never a direct Cork or Shannon flight to Brussels. I just had to get that off my chest.

Mr. Willie Walsh: If you are looking to attract new airlines into Ireland, they will do their analysis based on traffic flows and an assessment of where they can grow traffic. If you look at a map of routes served by Dublin, it is largely Europe and North America. Ireland is not connected to Asia or Africa and 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 and Taiwan. All of these are bigger economies than Ireland. You will not get an airline from any of those countries looking at an option other than Dublin. In 2024, Dublin ranked 69 on the busiest airports globally. Shannon does not appear on any list. The idea that airlines outside Ireland will consider flying to Shannon is just nonsense and needs to be put to bed. It will never happen.

An Cathaoirleach: I am asking in the context of the other 26 member states and 85% of national traffic going through a single airport.

I have to be fair to my colleagues. We will have a second round. Deputy Graves is next.

Deputy Ann Graves: I thank the witnesses for their statements. I represent Fingal east, whose residents are worst affected. I am referring to Swords, Malahide, Portmarnock and Donabate. I am a bit surprised at the “suck it up” attitude by the airlines. There are people who were living there long before the airport, generations before, out around St. Margaret's but there are also new estates that were built based on flight paths, and now those flight paths have changed.

I remind the airlines that their slots are permissions, not their property. I would like to point out that the cap has never been adhered to since its implementation. It was put in place by An Bord Pleanála to address the major infrastructure requirements that are needed around the airport and they have not been put in place. There has been a lot of talk about the growth in the economy and the increase in activity around the airport. I live in Swords and you cannot get in or out of there. It is already a mess, so one cannot say it is a good thing to increase all that extra transport. We do not have a metro despite it being promised for 35 years. We are probably one of the only cities that does not have transport in and out of the airport. I do not want to stand in the way of progress but we need to consider the people who are affected by it. We talk about the evidence of removing the cap and how great that will be for the economy but there is also evidence that the more noise there is from flights, the more impact there is on people's health and well-being. If we look at international best practice in places like Schipol, we see that it is reducing the time that planes can fly at night time. It has also been done in Australia and other places.

I have to leave because I have to speak in the Chamber shortly so I will just get through a few quick questions. This is for all the airlines. If the DAA were to act tomorrow to return the flight paths to the straight-ahead departures that were part of the 2007 environmental impact statement, would any of the airlines have objections? Nobody?

Ms Lynne Embleton: No, we follow the path.

Deputy Ann Graves: This is a question for Airlines for America and Aer Lingus. What percentage of transatlantic passengers originate from short-haul flights and never actually leave the airport? People going from one plane to another, or even in Ryanair where they are going from terminal 1 to terminal 2 to get on to a US carrier, do not actually contribute anything to the Irish economy. They probably do not even buy a cup of coffee, but there is this idea that there is going to be an increase.

Ms Lynne Embleton: They absolutely do contribute to the Irish economy. The only reason a country of six or seven million people has the level of connectivity that Ireland has is because of the hub. That is why the hub is so critical. It is why we cannot replace Dublin flights with

regional flights from Shannon and Cork. The only reason we can fill aircraft to the US is because 30% to 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 without a hub.

Deputy Ann Graves: Yes, but the argument is that it is contributing to the economy.

Ms Lynne Embleton: It is helping the economy.

Deputy Ann Graves: If someone gets on a plane in Europe-----

Ms Lynne Embleton: No.

Deputy Ann Graves: -----comes to Dublin, does not get off the flight or moves on to another flight, the only people who are making money out of that are the airlines and the DAA.

Ms Lynne Embleton: Absolutely not.

Deputy Ann Graves: It is not contributing to the Irish economy or the jobs in the airport.

Ms Lynne Embleton: Absolutely not. Ireland would not have the connectivity it has without those connecting passengers. Connections to Indianapolis and frequency to New York, Chicago and everywhere across the US brings valuable people into Ireland. It supports the economy, business and growth. The only reason we have that is because of those connecting passengers. Take them away and the connectivity in Ireland will plummet.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: On point-to-point traffic approximately 65% is inbound. These people get off the aeroplane and spend money in the economy and lots of other things are supported, such as connectivity for families going to see friends and relatives or their kids in college. There are people who actually work in the National Health Service in the UK and live in Ireland and move backwards and forwards all the time.

Deputy Ann Graves: I am talking about people who do not get off the plane or else they just transfer to another flight within the airport. I want to move on. Ryanair states that its new aircraft are 50% quieter. If that is the case, how has the noise level escalated to 343% above ANCA's noise abatement objective in 2019? How many decibels quieter is it? The DAA monitoring says that it is only 3 dB less than it previously was. Ryanair states it is 50% quieter.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: They consultants employed to do this had to go back to the drawing board and EU has referred it back as well. The way to look at it is to consider whether it make noise or not, rather than focusing on the times of day. The aircraft we have are 50% quieter than the original aircraft. We have changed from the Boeing 737-200 to the Boeing 737 MAX 8 and MAX 10. The MAX 10 is 50% quieter. Other airports around Europe manage this issue. They do a quota system. This encourages airlines to invest in these quieter aircraft. It is almost like a budget. It discourages it. For example, there are some airports that do not allow noisy aircraft at certain times. All those things make sense but we cannot just take arbitrary times or whatever because it affects how airlines operate. It would affect how the transatlantic routes would operate. They cannot all say when they are going to arrive because of weather conditions. From Ryanair's point of view any short-haul operator has to have a based aircraft starting between the critical time of 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. so that an aircraft can be based at an airport. If that cannot be done, it will just migrate somewhere else.

Deputy Ann Graves: I get Mr. Wilson's point but the night time flights are the worst in terms of people's health and well-being. It does happen that people are awoken from sleep. I live in the area and I know exactly what it is like.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: So do I.

Deputy Ann Graves: I am lucky enough that I do not live on a direct flight path, so I am fine but people down the road from me are on a direct flight path. I know that being woken from sleep has an impact on people's hearts, on their health and everything else.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: Yes, but the studies we have done show that it does not get above 50 dB. It is about 53 dB when the aircraft are overhead. We did a study on this just where the aircraft take off and make that right turn over St. Margaret's and Ashbourne and places like that. The aircraft are remarkably quiet. No matter what happens, if the aeroplanes turn somewhere else they will go over someone else's house. People who live beside an airport will have some level of disruption.

Deputy Ann Graves: People are not talking about noise in the distance. They are talking about the extreme noise that has been proven to be bad for health.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: Even overhead it is only about 50 dB.

An Cathaoirleach: Thank you. We will have a second round. Deputy Cathal Crowe is next.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: Thank you Chair. I will let another member go ahead of me. I was at another meeting so I might come in after the next speaker, if that is okay.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: I thank everyone for their submissions today. I will put a couple of questions to Mr. Sununu. His organisation joined the two airlines represented here and some others in taking a case against the passenger cap in the Irish High Court. I understand that this was referred to the European Court of Justice and there was an opinion of the advocate general of the court in February 2026. Is it fair to say that the advocate general came out fairly strongly against the airlines' position and held that the passenger cap is not a violation of EU law?

Mr. Chris Sununu: It is fair to say but, again, that is why this body needs to act. The detrimental effects of that would be huge. We can sit around and have things staid. We can sit around and wait until what happens this fall. We can sit around for another court hearing. If I may, I want to address something that was brought up-----

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: If you-----

Mr. Chris Sununu: If you lose 10% or 15% of the passengers, you lose 10% or 15% of the jobs.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Sorry, Mr. Sununu, this is my time for questions and I only have eight minutes. The Court of Justice follows the advocate general's ruling in about 70% to 80% of cases. I say that because words like "violated" and "unlawful" have been used quite a lot today. The clear statement we have from the European Court of Justice is that the passenger cap is not in breach of law. I understand that we are waiting for a decision from the Court of Justice. I think it is important that is on the record.

Mr. Chris Sununu: It violates the agreement our countries have had. It is a direct violation of that, clear as day.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Did Airlines for America's legal team raise the violation of the EU-US open skies agreement when the matter was discussed in the Irish High Court?

Mr. Chris Sununu: Yes.

Mr. Keith Glatz: In the Irish High Court this was our position. Before the European Court of Justice the matter of international law is not under consideration.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Why is it not under consideration?

Mr. Keith Glatz: As it was referred to by the Irish High Court, it is a question about EU domestic law, as it applies within the EU but not as it applies to the commitments of Ireland under the US-EU open skies agreement.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Are there processes under the open skies agreement where the issues that the organisations have with the passenger cap can be addressed?

Mr. Keith Glatz: Under the open skies agreement, there are obligations on each side to allow for these flights to occur. When those flights do not occur, then there are provisions within the agreement and within the regulations of the US Department of Transportation to discipline the marketplace to ensure that we have a fair and equal opportunity to compete.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Where an issue comes up, is there a concept of a joint committee being convened to examine the particular issue and tease out a resolution?

Mr. Keith Glatz: 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. Our understanding is that the US Government, the EU and the Irish Government are having those conversations informally.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Has a joint committee been established on the concerns with the passenger cap?

Mr. Keith Glatz: The joint committee is an establishment that meets annually, apart from any particular issue. This issue was raised at the last joint committee meeting.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: What is the resolution from the joint committee?

Mr. Keith Glatz: It is that the EU would continue to work on the issue.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: In what way?

Mr. Keith Glatz: That is a great question, and that is why we are here. We are looking for a resolution. A joint committee is basically a policy talk shop between the two governments.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: I believe Mr. Sununu's organisation has previously taken a case about an EU-wide measure, the emissions trading system, potentially breaching the open skies agreement. Is it correct that the emissions trading system was found not to breach the open skies agreement?

Mr. Chris Sununu: I believe that is right. Yes.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: That is from 2011. Mr. Sununu has been very clear in his submission on the overall decision on open skies. He said that there is a risk of retaliation here. It is not clear to me where it has been established that there is a violation of open skies.

Mr. Chris Sununu: The open skies agreement is very clear that you allow unfettered and unlimited access to the capacity of the airport. This would not be doing that. This airport could take 40 million people but you are saying "No, we are going to limit it. We are going to violate that open, free access." You can have as many flights as you want and as many passengers as you want. That is all understood, but this violates that.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: It is Mr. Sununu's understanding and the position of his organisation that there is a violation but it has not been proven.

Mr. Chris Sununu: It is the US Government's position as well.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Yes, and the US Government's position, but it has not been found to be a violation at any point at this stage. Is that not the case?

Mr. Chris Sununu: Yes, it has. The Deputy should read the statement. It is a clear violation. You cannot artificially limit access. That is a violation.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: With respect, Mr. Sununu saying he thinks that it is a violation is not a finding that it is a violation. This is an international agreement. I am not clear whether the legality has been tested in an international forum that the cap here represents a violation.

Mr. Keith Glatz: The fact that the Irish High Court issued a stay shows that there is irreparable harm. The reason that standard is used in the courts to issue a stay is that it looks at the case and it says it is far more likely that there is a problem here under this agreement; therefore it issued the stay so that the airlines and those parties to the agreement are not harmed unnecessarily while it figures out exactly how it affects the agreement.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: With respect, the stay is related to the process of referring a case up to the European Court of Justice. It is not unusual.

Mr. Donal Moriarty: If I may, I will 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. It is our view that there is no past or present harm. That is reflected in the capacity growth that has been seen in Dublin and to Ireland from North American carriers.

However, it is incumbent on the Government to urgently pass the legislation and to issue the ministerial order so as to ensure that there is no future harm. It is our strong view, and it is borne out by the facts, that there has been no past or present harm to date.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Does open skies provide an unlimited right to slots for US airlines across Europe? Is the contention of the witnesses that it is an unlimited right?

Mr. Chris Sununu: Yes, as long as they are available. It is to the point of availability.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: To the point of availability. Is the ruling or opinion of the Advocate General 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?

Mr. Keith Glatz: That is applicable to EU domestic legislation, however. That sits underneath the international treaty obligations of the Government of Ireland and those of the EU and the United States. They supersede those issues. While you could have a cap that might apply to domestic routings here, that cap would not apply to the international operations.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: In the Irish courts, did the witnesses not ask the judge to refer that question of the balance between EU law and the open skies agreement, which seems to be the nub of the issue, up to the Court of Justice?

Mr. Keith Glatz: It is not a question for the European Court of Justice.

An Cathaoirleach: I will just briefly follow on from that. Notwithstanding the pending decision of the European Court of Justice, is it the position of the witnesses that the threat of US retaliation has been discussed, that the threat is real, and concrete measures like restricting access for Aer Lingus have been explicitly discussed?

Mr. Chris Sununu: Yes.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I apologise, as this meeting coincided with another meeting. I was following this one remotely. I welcome all of the witnesses.

I take great exception to the terms "violation" and "reciprocal threats" being used. Open skies is a multilateral agreement between countries, not between airports. If this was an agreement that Dublin Airport had struck with JFK, Chicago or wherever else, the witnesses could rightly say that the imposition of a cap, whether we like it or not, could be a barrier to open skies.

The cap was introduced in 2007. Open skies is a multilateral, international, country-to-country agreement that came into effect in 2008. Did the witnesses object to this at the time open skies was agreed? Was it raised at the time?

Mr. Chris Sununu: I think there was concern by all the airlines the second it came into play. The hope was it would disappear. People would realise it was a violation and that, as the pressure built and the reality of flights leaving and economic realities came to bear, there would be a change. We are kind of at that point now. The pressure has built to the point where we have-----

Deputy Cathal Crowe: The companies have waited 19 years for pressure to build to a point where they are taking action.

Mr. Chris Sununu: I do not represent the Government. I represent the airlines. The message from the airlines is very clear. We have to make decisions to move equipment and flights. We are not going to wait for a court decision here and a court decision there because these things have to be decided in advance.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: Up to quite recently Mr. Sununu held high political office. This is our Parliament. Will he please withdraw the use of the term "violation" because it does not represent where things are at? The truth is that Ireland Inc. has many airports. They may not

all be big – some are quite small and 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 or a single inch to the runway, it can take double the number of flights. It could take all the American carriers. It takes many of them. In terms of open skies at this moment, it is a commercial decision for US airlines. They are choosing to fly into the capital. That is fine. I do not necessarily agree with that but it is fine. To call it a violation is simply a misrepresentation. The airlines can fly into Shannon. Ireland Inc. has adequate airport landing slots, runway space and everything else to cater for US airlines. They are making a commercial decision here. To come into our Parliament and say it is a violation by our Government and Parliament is absolutely disingenuous. I ask the witnesses to withdraw that remark.

Mr. Chris Sununu: No, it is 100% spot on.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: Mr. Sununu should stand over it then legally. Could he tell me why it is a violation?

Mr. Chris Sununu: Again, the agreement is not an airport-to-airport agreement but it provides airport-to-airport access. It is access to slots and gates. We deal with this issue elsewhere. It is not unique to here. We have a couple of other small issues in other parts of Europe. Every country has multiple airports but these are still very real issues for each of these localities.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: It was flagged to me through back channels before St. Patrick's Day that, when our Ministers were in the US, at every function they went to, they were going to be hit with the message that the US is not happy and was going to retaliate. That is a term that has crept into US politics far too much if you ask me, but that is a matter for others. The reality is that this is not a violation and there is adequate capacity at other Irish airports to cater for a certain amount before we get to the cap point.

Two of our major airlines have representatives here. I thank them for all they are doing to get people into and out of our country. They are valued in the Irish economy. I have been making the point in this committee that there is something missing in this country that other countries have. There is no cognisance given to balanced regional development here. I know both airlines will come back and say that these are commercial decisions and that they fly where the passengers want in order to meet demand. However, the Dutch have brought in measures in this area and these align with EU regulations. Certain flights go into Schiphol, the capital's airport, but holiday flights to the sun are more likely to fly out of Rotterdam. Could anything be done to get more of the routes the airlines operate to fly out from the regional airports?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: I do not know where people are coming from with this Dutch system. The Dutch are the greatest gamers of aircraft capacity ever known. They have the most expensive airports. I cannot think of a regional airport in the Netherlands that takes traffic. It costs €100 per passenger to land at Schiphol. That is the reason it is maxed out. Ryanair has developed point-to-point regional connectivity here. The Deputy will know this from his experience of Shannon, where there is international traffic. We have doubled that since before the Covid pandemic. We have four aircraft based in Shannon. Knock airport is a miracle in more ways than one. We always put it out there in Europe to show that a west of Ireland airport that has no city within 50 miles of it, bar Galway, is able to attract almost 1 million passengers. We have to get real here. Ireland is one of the most connected places. There are fewer than 5

million people in this country. We can all dance on the head of a pint here but this is self-inflicted. We have a passenger cap. There is not another airport-----

Deputy Cathal Crowe: While Mr. Wilson might not like the Dutch policy, Ryanair adheres to it.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: With respect, there is not another airport in Europe that constrains capacity based on road access from 2007. Such an airport does not exist. Airports are restricted because of slots, runway capacity and terminal capacity. Dublin can take another 10 million or 15 million passengers. We are restricting one of the greatest success stories in Europe as regards low-cost connectivity, not just into Europe with Ryanair but also across the Atlantic with Aer Lingus and all of the American carriers. We need to scrap the cap.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: Will Mr. Wilson tell me how Ryanair navigates its way around the Dutch regulations? He might not like them. Many people do not. They do exist, however.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: It is not that I do not like them. They do not exist. There is no regional airport structure. I have gone to meetings in the Netherlands and I have done Utrecht, Amsterdam and Rotterdam all before lunchtime in a car. It is a tiny country. It does not have regional airports.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I have some questions for Ms Embleton and Mr. Moriarty. Will they give us some insight into Aer Lingus's logic? One of the things I often bemoan is that, in recent years, everything is either the budget airline sector or hub-to-hub flights. Why is it that there will be 16 services between Dublin and Schiphol Amsterdam Airport today when there are none between that airport and Ireland's regional airports? What is informing all of these decisions? Surely, a lot of that passenger base is travelling up from the country to go to Dublin. Will the witnesses enlighten us as to why everything is out of the capital?

Ms Lynne Embleton: First and foremost, we follow demand. We put our aircraft where we think we can make a return. From Aer Lingus's perspective, I want to come back to the concept of the hub. The hub matters. The only reason we have the connectivity we have is that we take customers from around Europe and the UK, channel them through Dublin and send them to the US. That leaves Ireland punching way above its weight in terms of connectivity.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I agree with that.

Ms Lynne Embleton: I have to make choices and trade-offs in where I put aircraft. I do not have an unlimited supply of aircraft. We have to make a return to justify giving the aircraft to an airport.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: Will there be any dividend for Dublin, Shannon or Cork arising from the closure of the Manchester hub?

Ms Lynne Embleton: We are looking at how we will apply the two long-haul aircraft we had based in Manchester. However, I am not the only one within our group fighting for aircraft. Those aircraft are in demand. We have to follow the money.

An Cathaoirleach: I said that I would allow Deputy Toole in during this first round. We will go to a second round shortly.

Deputy Gillian Toole: I apologise for being late. I was bilocating at another committee. I represent the area of Meath East, a commuter area just north of the city. There is an area I would like to focus on. Having looked at all of the organisations' websites, gone through policies and so on, it is fair to say that the common denominator is sustainability and adherence to the 17 sustainable development goals. There are different policies in this regard. For example, Ryanair does not seek competitive advantage through illegal or unethical business practices. Aer Lingus supports its people and its local community and operates the TakeOff Foundation. It is very much people-orientated. It is about open skies, connecting people and connecting communities. Without a doubt, for people living in my area, Dublin Airport is important from the perspective of employment, for connectivity with the diaspora and for the extremely important economic benefits of inward and outward bound traffic.

I will go back to sustainability and the SDGs. The SDGs are founded on five pillars, the first of which is people. SDG No. 3 relates to good health and well-being, No. 11 relates to sustainable communities, No. 15 relates to getting outdoors and No. 17 relates to partnerships. It has been economically assessed that the community that I represent, the best part of the 30,000 people who are impacted by the change to the flight paths, is bearing the brunt of an €800 million a year health impact arising from the flights flying on this flight path, which was never part of the noise preferential corridor. It was not subject to an environmental impact assessment back in 2007. There was no consultation. There is a simple fix, which has been put forward by the North Runway Technical Group. It is simply to adhere to the 5 nautical mile straight-out route. That and the dependent mode operation of the north and south runways would enable an increase in capacity. What objections do the witnesses' organisations, either separately or collectively, have to the north runway being used in the way it was intended to be used and as was envisaged when the EIA was carried out in 2007?

An Cathaoirleach: We just have two minutes. Does the Deputy want to direct her questions to someone in particular?

Deputy Gillian Toole: I will primarily direct them to the airlines. They are most relevant to them. Again, it is about that balance. These are the people on the ground.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: We covered this earlier. We take those instructions. If the flight paths change, the flight paths change. It is as simple as that. That is the case. It is not a question of planning permission or anything. This is set down. The Deputy's question should be directed to AirNav, which actually lays down the routes. I presume that if the path does not turn right, it will go over someone else's house. The reality is that, if you live near an airport, there is going to be an impact. The good news is that aircraft are getting quieter. They have to fly over somewhere, however. I do not think there is any green area right out of Dublin going west where you would not go over some urban area. The short answer is that we have no objection.

Deputy Gillian Toole: Is it about saving time or saving fuel? Is that relevant?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: That has absolutely zero to do with it. We do exactly what we are told at every airport. If we are told we have to fly in a figure of eight because that is the best approach, that is what we have to do. It is set down. Mr. Walsh is a former pilot. I am sure he can give exact details on that.

Mr. Willie Walsh: The departure routing will be followed. Neither the airline nor the pilot determines the departure routing. If a different departure routing for Dublin is published, the airlines will comply with that 100%. There is no objection to that.

Deputy Gillian Toole: This is just a simple approach, taking a personal fly at it, but would the witnesses approach the DAA, the IAA and so on to ask for this to be implemented?

As the proposed legislation progresses, public pressure will probably build on public representatives to support or not support it, as the case may be. Is that something can be explored? This is very simple, but it is also very relevant.

Ms Lynne Embleton: I echo what has already been have said. We have no discretion over the flight paths taken after take-off. We follow the SID route every time. We are 100% compliant. I have a letter in front of me from 22 January 2025-----

An Cathaoirleach: I ask Ms Embleton to be brief.

Ms Lynne Embleton: -----that was addressed to the DAA on exactly this issue. We offered our support and technical support in the context of both helping and urging it to resolve the matter. I have a letter in front of me from 29 April 2025 which we wrote to the DAA and which states that this issue needs to be resolved. We noticed a discrepancy between the SID paths that we fly and the straight-out path that was in the planning. We have offered our help and support, and asked it to address this.

Deputy Gillian Toole: I ask Ms Embleton to supply that correspondence to the committee.

Ms Lynne Embleton: I will check that with my team before I do that.

An Cathaoirleach: Before we move on, do any of our witnesses need a quick break? No, everyone is okay.

We will start a second round of five minutes per member. It is the same type of rota. I call Deputy Clifford-Lee. I apologise, I mean Senator Clifford-Lee. I promoted her there, but we never know, she might be.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: I remind the Chair that the Seanad is the Upper House. Maybe he can recheck that.

I want to pick up on the point that Deputy Toole raised. If the witnesses could supply the correspondence in question, that would be very helpful. It would go a long way to resolving many of the problems relating to the flight paths. This is certainly new information to those of us who have been engaging with the communities over the past number of years. That correspondence would be very helpful from our point of view. As Deputy Toole stated, the pressure is on those of us who are near the airport. We certainly want to resolve the situation in a positive way while keeping in mind the communities around the airport.

I am fully supportive of Dublin Airport. I recognise the economic benefit, not only to the communities around but the country. I am in favour of the cap lifting, but I am in favour of the communities being dealt with fairly. That is the main reason I am here. The vast majority of people living in and around St. Margaret's have been there for generations. They were there long before Dublin Airport. We need to work in a collaborative fashion to resolve the issues. They are not unresolvable. Anything that the witnesses can do to work with the members of

the committee to move things forward would be appreciated. It is good to have it on the record that the airline would not object to using any flight path that might resolve issues and that it is offering its technical expertise to the DAA in this regard. That is something that we can all work on.

Ms Embleton's point in relation to the hub, the direct economic benefit it offers allowing the connectivity it facilitates is very important. If that hub status were to be diminished, what would the impact be on the connectivity and on the number of flights that would be able to be supported by domestic demand?

Ms Lynne Embleton: It is well established that the hubs are exponential in nature. The more feed one gives them, the more new routes one can open up. If I do a rough rule of thumb and say that we have got the second biggest north Atlantic network but are the 17th biggest economy, we can see what would happen without the hub. It would collapse exponentially if we do have the ability to feed in aircraft. Every one of the destinations involved - there are more than 20 destinations in the US - brings value to the Irish economy. This is a significant issue. It is important that we come back to this topic. Although I do understand the local issues around noise and the environment, fundamentally, this is a national choice for Ireland. If action to remove the cap and bring the proposed legislation in does not happen faster than the pace at which I fear it is happening, we are looking at a serious risk of cancelled trips, lost jobs, economic harm and higher fares. That risk is right on our doorstep. We need to focus our efforts on how we accelerate the removal of this cap. We will be looking at a very serious situation very soon if this is not resolved.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: On the economic benefit, let us say that there are 30 passengers on a transatlantic flight connecting through Dublin. If they were not to connect to another flight and went off and spent five days in Dublin, the economic benefit of that is far less than the overall economic benefit of having the hub status, the direct flights and the number of direct flights.

Ms Lynne Embleton: We fly more than 2 million people across the Atlantic. We have grown that by 20% or 30% since Covid-19. That is bringing real value. We cannot do that without a hub. If we have to take a 12% reduction, not to mention stopping future growth, we will unwind much of the development we have done in our transatlantic network, which supports not only foreign direct investment but also bringing people to Ireland for business and leisure. Importantly, it supports Irish jobs. Irish pilots, Irish engineers, Irish cabin crew and a whole infrastructure of Irish jobs depend on aviation. Those jobs are not just in Dublin; we have engineering and other facilities across Ireland that we draw on to support the Aer Lingus operation.

Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee: I thank Ms Embleton for clarifying that. In the small amount of time remaining, I want to make a brief comment regarding foreign direct investment. It was stated that the foreign direct investment from the United States into Ireland is significant. We all acknowledge that. In 2024, \$30.1 billion from Irish companies was invested in the United States. That should also be acknowledged alongside the foreign direct investment from the United States into Ireland.

An Cathaoirleach: Ms Embleton heard the evidence of airlines for America that the threat of retaliatory measures is real and actively being discussed with the US Administration and in

particular measures that target Aer Lingus's access to US airports. Do the witnesses think that is simply a negotiating tactic by Airlines for America aimed at putting pressure on the Government to act or do they consider the threat real? Has there been any direct or indirect contact from US regulatory authorities in this regard?

Ms Lynne Embleton: On the last question, there has been no direct contact.

An Cathaoirleach: Has there been indirect contact?

Ms Lynne Embleton: No. Do I think this is real? Absolutely, I think this is real. Let us look at the geopolitical situation. I do not want to predict what will happen tomorrow let alone what will happen over the course of the next few months. The geopolitical situation is very active and sometimes unpredictable. There is a serious risk of retaliation. Let me clear about what will happen if this cap is enacted. Forget the retaliation, we are looking at a 12% reduction next year if this cap is not lifted and if the IAA takes the cap into account when it declares capacity. That will result in a loss of jobs, higher air fares and economic damage. That is the damage we will be doing to ourselves, regardless of the damage that the US will inflict on top of that.

An Cathaoirleach: Does Mr. Walsh wish to comment on that?

Mr. Willie Walsh: I can say from experience that the threat is absolutely real.

An Cathaoirleach: Is there a precedent for such retaliatory action?

Mr. Willie Walsh: Yes.

An Cathaoirleach: Canada was mentioned.

Mr. Willie Walsh: There are plenty of precedents-----

An Cathaoirleach: This is not withstanding the legal position. Ultimately, the US Administration tends to do-----

Mr. Willie Walsh: It is not just the US. We have seen this in other parts of the world as well. This is real. We would expect Ireland to take a similar position if action was taken to prevent Irish businesses at the expense of facilitating somebody else. We would expect the Government to act. Without the question, this is real. This is high risk. As Ms Embleton said, it is not the risk of retaliation. There is an immediate risk to what is in and what is operating in Dublin Airport today if we have to reduce the number of slots associated with implementing a cap, which, in itself, is a major problem. When I took over as CEO of Aer Lingus in 2001, average occupancy of a flight into Dublin was 90 passengers. In 2007, it was 121. This year, it will be about 155. The industry continues to perform well, but if new restrictions continue to be imposed, it will have a disastrous impact.

It will start reversing a lot of the benefits that Ireland has achieved through growth over the past ten years.

An Cathaoirleach: In the couple of minutes I have left, I will briefly talk about the DAA. We have had a number of hearings to date. Much of the discussion has been around infrastructure, wastewater, noise mitigation, emissions, community impacts and so on. Is there any area of critical infrastructure that is a concern, particularly for Ryanair and Aer Lingus?

Are there any binding obligations that should be put on the Dublin Airport Authority if the cap is lifted?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: If we look at what the cost base is, it still has not been published and the detail of it has not been given to the IAA, which now performs the functions that the Commission for Aviation Regulation previously performed. Notwithstanding that, it is talking about spending €9 billion on upgrading the airport. In Spain - and we do not agree with the Spanish either - the authorities want to invest €9 billion in 46 airports, including major hubs in Madrid and Barcelona. This is off the wall. The narrative here is always as if traffic is going to move from Dublin to Shannon or Cork. There are airports in London at the moment that are delighted about the cap, if it goes ahead, because they will get the traffic straight away. Two aircraft have already gone. That is what is going to happen; the business is going to migrate. They are going to make themselves uncompetitive.

An Cathaoirleach: My question was whether any binding obligations should be put on the DAA if we decide to remove the cap?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: That would involve another structure with the IAA. The IAA determined the cost base and approved the capital expenditure. That expenditure is nuts. It involves building tunnels under runways and all of that.

Ms Lynne Embleton: The short answer is "No". The airport has already shown that it can operate with more than the cap. We are operating in the context of 36 million passengers now.

An Cathaoirleach: Is Ms Embleton aware that there are significant wastewater issues at Ringsend?

Ms Lynne Embleton: I am. The airport has not yet implemented any of its development plan, which has been around since 2018 or 2019. The airport needs to get on with implementing the plan it has, but the IAA natural declaration of stands and capacity will take that into account.

An Cathaoirleach: Thank you.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: When the passenger cap was introduced in 2007, it was not meant as a climate mitigation measure. Rather, it related to infrastructure. If we were designing a climate measure for Dublin Airport, I certainly would not choose a cap. I do not think it is an effective measure. Nevertheless, we all recognise that removing the cap and the consequent growth in the number of flights in and out of the airport is going to have a climate implication. Both airlines have made it very clear that they are looking to grow numbers and grow flights through the airport. In the context of all five opening statements, I was struck by the fact that the issue of climate did not come up at all. I am conscious that the witnesses are here representing stakeholders and shareholders, but, as legislators, we have to look at the overall picture.

This question is for Ryanair and Aer Lingus. Is there any upper limit to the growth of Dublin Airport that the airlines would see as acceptable? How will the significant growth plans outlined for the two airlines impact on Ireland's international obligations under the Paris Agreement in terms of reducing our climate emissions?

Mr. Willie Walsh: I will comment globally. I have heard people say that passenger numbers are a proxy for environmental issues. They are not. For example, globally since 2007

passenger numbers have doubled from just under 2.5 billion to 5 billion. In the same period, carbon emissions have increased by 45%. It is not a like-for-like comparison because the industry has become more efficient. I accept that CO2 levels have increased, but I think people who say there is a direct correlation-----

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: I did not say it was like for like.

Mr. Willie Walsh: -----between passenger growth and carbon emissions are wrong. We can continue to grow passenger numbers without a meaningful impact on the environment.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Without a meaningful impact on the environment.

Mr. Willie Walsh: Yes, without a meaningful impact on the environment.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: In the context of an increase in the cap from 32 million passengers at present to 40 million, Mr. Walsh does not think there will be a meaningful increase in CO2 emissions. Is that correct?

Mr. Willie Walsh: Yes, because it will depend on the aircraft being used, the routes being operated and the type of fuel being used. There are a lot of factors that would have an impact. The aircraft being introduced are significantly more fuel efficient than the aircraft they are replacing.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Does Mr. Walsh think we can go beyond 40 million passengers with wider growth at Dublin Airport and increased throughput?

Mr. Willie Walsh: The industry has committed to achieving net zero by 2050, so these things go hand in hand. The longer term objective to get to net zero by 2050 will be facilitated by a number of measures, including the use of sustainable fuels, new technology and advances in air traffic control.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Sustainable aviation fuel, SAF, is still very much in its infancy. Is that not fair to say?

Mr. Willie Walsh: It is, yes.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Is it not fair to say that there is a lot of hope at the moment in the context of relying on SAF to help meet that net zero target?

Mr. Willie Walsh: I would say it is a reality more than a hope. We know that it is technologically possible. As the Deputy knows, the EU is mandating the use of sustainable fuels. Governments around the world are facilitating that, and several are incentivising the production of these fuels.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: At the scale necessary to replace the fuels used currently on flights and to meet the fuel requirements for the new flights that our airlines have indicated they wish to drive forward, it is a huge ask in terms of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 to rely on a technology that is still in its infancy.

Mr. Willie Walsh: It is a big task, but it is technically possible to achieve. We have demonstrated that there is a credible path to net zero by 2050. It is extremely difficult, challenging and expensive, but it is a credible path.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: Mr. Wilson might address this point.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: Mr. Walsh made the point about net zero in the longer term. In the short term, looking at the cap, if we take it down to company level, Ryanair has 300 of the most fuel-efficient aircraft on the market on order. They are going to go somewhere in Europe. The question is how many of them are going to come to Dublin? If the cap is imposed, not only will there be no growth, it will go backwards. The climate debate cannot be in a silo over Ireland. In the case of all the extra capacity that we are going to bring, it is just going to go elsewhere. We are well aware of our commitment and it is not all in terms of our climate credentials. I will not list them all now, but what I can say is that this is the hub of economic activity on an island. We are going to have to do something about that or otherwise these aircraft are going to go elsewhere, and we are going to export that. In the case of Ryanair, it will be to other European countries. In the case of Aer Lingus, it will have less traction in the context of its hub status, and we are giving away all the good work that we have put in over the past number of years.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I want to go back to the point I made earlier. We all recognise that this has to be lifted. The onus is on us here to expedite this politically and get things moving. There are certain balances we have to achieve. While this session may be frustrating for the industry, it is part of our legislative process. The matter has to come here before it goes up the chain and ultimately gets voted on. However, in the course of discussions, some of the commentary has been injurious to the reputation of Ireland Inc. We pride ourselves as leaders in aviation. The aviation leasing industry has a huge presence here. We have some great airlines and some great routes.

I want to return to that point because I feel very strongly about it. I do not accept that there has been a violation. The cap is unworkable and undesirable, but the country and the Government have not failed. There is no violation. I go back to that point because it is an international, country-to-country, government-to-government agreement; it is not airport to airport. Last winter, 40 airports in America - albeit for a short enough period - had caps imposed on them. Was that a violation? Was it a violation when Amsterdam Schipol imposed environmental standards which some of the witnesses may agree with and some may think are nonsense? The industry and its shareholders may feel there was a violation but no court of law has determined that. Unless something has happened in very recent times, to my understanding, the Dutch model has been tested and stands up in the context of EU regulation.

Mr. Keith Glatz: The Supreme Court in the Netherlands struck down the air traffic decree that was proposed by both previous coalition governments.

The European Union has also found on numerous occasions that it has not followed EU law, so in fact it is the position not only of the airline industry, which is united at this table, but also of the legal system in the Netherlands and that of the European Commission. That is the reason the Dutch have not successfully been able to implement any of the proposals around the issues they have continuously put out. They have once again circled back on this and they will once again lose.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: By extension, and using some of the language that was used earlier in the session, was it a violation then for 40 US airports to be capped to some extent last winter?

Mr. Keith Glatz: I am not familiar with what the Deputy is referring to.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: There was a temporary cap imposed in 40 US airports for a short period last winter.

Mr. Willie Walsh: The decision was safety related so that would not be a violation. The restrictions that were put in place were largely down to air traffic control, ATC, issues. We have this in different countries at different times.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: At the time it was ATC and worker related.

Mr. Willie Walsh: Yes, it was principally air traffic control.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: There was also the strict enforcement of slots at La Guardia, JFK and Ronald Reagan airport.

Mr. Willie Walsh: It happens all the time.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: In my remaining time I want to ask questions of both Aer Lingus and Ryanair. At the end of the day I have to try to get elected down home. What are their plans for Shannon and the mid-west? I know the debate is dominated by Dublin Airport, but could they just give a snippet of information as to where they see things going in the mid-west because there is a lot to offer there? I thank the airlines for the services they are already operating in and out of that airport.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: We have given a growth plan to the Government, which is heavily weighted towards regional airports. In Shannon, we plan to grow to having seven aircraft based there and more than 4 million passengers.

Likewise in Cork, we hope to have up to 4.5 million passengers. We would open a base in Knock as well. No other airline has invested in regional airports. Shannon has got the extra aircraft. I am sorry that we cannot do Amsterdam but we have Madrid and Rome for this year.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: Is there a timeline for some of that?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: No, but that is with the Government now. We put an extra aircraft into Shannon this year. It is growing faster than Cork has grown. They are doing a fantastic job down there because they are trying to remain competitive.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: Is heavy maintenance back on the agenda?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: Potentially. Last week I opened 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.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: Could Ms Embleton please respond?

Ms Lynne Embleton: We do have to trade off where the aircraft go, but we have added new routes into Cork this year, all ready for summer. I am really pleased that we have added frequency on the Shannon-New York and Shannon-Boston routes. That is something we have been looking at for a while. That is in for this year as well. I assure Deputy Crowe that we have the regional airports on our radar. We look at all of the trade-offs when we are looking to allocate our sets and when it makes sense to do so we put them into the regions.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I thank the witnesses.

An Cathaoirleach: Could I briefly ask the witnesses about Waterford? I put on record that I am from the south east. Is there potential in Waterford?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: It is limited. We talk to them all right but I refer to Waterford's proximity to Dublin and to the road network. It is halfway between there and Cork. I would not rule it out but it would be very difficult.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. Wilson.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: I thank the witnesses very much. I am sorry that I had to go in and out as I missed some of the meeting. At the moment the world is so catastrophic and there is no doubt that we are in the middle of a climate catastrophe. I want to talk about emissions. Naturally, if there are fewer flights available we are going to reduce emissions. We know that airline fuel is not subject to carbon tax or excise duty. I would like to hear the thoughts of the witnesses on that. How would they feel about the introduction of carbon tax? Do they really see that we will be net zero by 2050? Realistically, I cannot see that happening. Would carbon tax on jet fuel impact that?

Mr. Willie Walsh: I believe it is possible for this industry to transition to net zero in 2050. As I have said, it will be challenging and difficult.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: How will it be done?

Mr. Willie Walsh: Through a number of actions. The principal one will be the use of sustainable fuels, which are a reality. When we speak about sustainable aviation fuel, the point should be made that a refinery producing sustainable fuels for aviation will provide sustainable fuels for other forms of transport and other industries that require them.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: Is that biomass fuels?

Mr. Willie Walsh: It can be biomass and in the longer term it can be synthetic fuels.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: When is that coming on stream?

Mr. Willie Walsh: They are here today. We are using sustainable fuels today.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: Studies have been done and it has been said that we would need an area the size of Tipperary to grow biomass for fuels to use in the airline industry.

Mr. Willie Walsh: There is an opportunity for Ireland in the longer term for the production of sustainable fuels through the generation of renewable electricity from offshore wind. That represents a great opportunity for Ireland-----

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: I agree with Mr. Walsh.

Mr. Willie Walsh: -----to produce an industry that will reduce Ireland's dependence on importing fuels.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: Where is the money going to come from for that? Would Mr. Walsh be in favour of a carbon tax on jet fuel that would directly contribute to renewable energy?

Mr. Willie Walsh: No, I am not in favour of carbon tax and I will tell the Senator why. Taxation is a blunt instrument that has proven to be completely ineffective. If Senator

Cosgrove, as a politician, wants to introduce it, let us be honest about it. What she will do is ensure that the aircraft that are flying today will continue to fly but they will fly with fewer people on the aircraft. We will price aviation out for the poorer in society. If that is what she wants, that is what she will get through taxation.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: How come we, as consumers, all have to pay carbon tax on our household fuels, and on all other fuels, particularly at the moment?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: There is a carbon tax. It is one of the greatest fallacies ever. With the emissions trading system, ETS, scheme, this year Ryanair will pay €1.5 billion in carbon taxes.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: To whom?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: On some routes it would be in excess of €10 per passenger.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: Where is that carbon tax going?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: It runs the school buses here for a start. ETS is collected and then repatriated to the Government. What do we do with it in Ireland? We put it into diesel-pumping school buses. It should have been taken out of the education budget. It should have been reinvested into carbon-reducing initiatives. The view is that this industry is primarily responsible for our climate catastrophe. We are not.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: Some 6% of emissions are due to airlines.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: This industry is responsible for between 2.5% and 2.8% of global emissions.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: It is 6% in Ireland, and 85% of that is from Dublin Airport.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: We all live in the one atmosphere. It is not going to make any difference to the climate whether it goes into Dublin or Barcelona. We pay rapacious carbon taxes at the moment. Our friends from A4A, who we met this morning, do not pay emissions trading coming in, for various different reasons. It is the same with the Gulf carriers coming into Europe. We go around shooting ourselves in the foot.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: There are lobby groups and big companies that are opposed to carbon tax.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: Could Senator Cosgrove please hold on? I cannot let her say that. We are paying €1.5 billion this year in carbon taxes.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: Is that under the European Union energy tax directive?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: There are various different taxes all over Europe, including environmental taxes in different countries.

Mr. Willie Walsh: There is air passenger duty and CORSIA for international aviation.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: Air passenger duty, emissions trading, CORSIA – the whole lot.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: I speak about in Ireland though.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: Yes.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: I live in the west. Was part of the reason the cap was introduced in the first place to promote balanced regional development?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: It does not work that way. People seem to think this works in a binary way and some nationalistic agenda. It does not. Airlines make decisions on where to allocate capacity. We do not allocate capacity to the west because the aircraft that go there start from Spain or England. It does not work that way.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: In fairness to Ryanair, we have options in the west. I would love to find out from Aer Lingus if there are options to expand more routes in the west.

Ms Lynne Embleton: They are limited, and where they exist we take them. I would like to come back to the Senator's core point about decarbonisation. That is the debate Ireland should be having. If we bring in carbon taxes and fuel taxes, that is just shooting Ireland in the foot again. Let me talk about decarbonisation. Sustainable aviation fuel exists. We use it. IAG is one of the biggest users of it globally.

We believe in the decarbonisation of this industry. What Ireland should be doing is asking how it gets a huge slice of this industry as it develops. There is an opportunity for jobs and for economic contribution as the future industry that does not yet exist, but that takes the power away from the Middle East and the oil-producing nations.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: I agree.

Ms Lynne Embleton: We need a national policy that develops sustainable aviation fuel that we all benefit from, that allows the connectivity we will all need to enjoy, and that supports the economy and brings benefit from participating in an industry that is fledgling, but that exists. The technology is proven and it needs to grow at scale. That is where the debate should be.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: I ask Mr. Sununu to comment on the same thing from an international American airline point of view.

Mr. Chris Sununu: I will go to the core of the question and to the member's previous point as to whether 40 million is the right number. Under her argument, zero would be the right number. If the argument is that every additional aeroplane is a degradation of the environment, then theoretically, I guess we should go to zero, or is it 30 million, or 50 million?

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: Will there be a transition to using biomass fuels, or will the industry pay an offset?

Mr. Chris Sununu: Above and beyond carbon taxes, which the other folks here have testified are a blunt, lazy instrument in terms of promoting strong environmental changes, my members have put billions of their own dollars, of their own volition, into the research and development of the technology behind sustainable aviation fuels.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: How is that going?

Mr. Chris Sununu: The United States of America is the only place that is going to have a certified eSAF fuel system coming online, the first one in the world-----

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: When?

Mr. Chris Sununu: -----not because of taxes, not because of government mandates, but because the industry had the financial flexibility to make its own investments, knowing that it wanted to grow.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: Is that just for the greater good and to bring down global emissions?

Mr. Chris Sununu: Of course, yes, and not just in the airline industry, but in all the different industries.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: Mr. Sununu does not think carbon tax has anything to do with that.

Mr. Chris Sununu: No, I argue that what would potentially happen by reducing the number of flights here is that billions of dollars are pulled from the economy. As a former governor, I can tell the Senator that one of the best instruments was not taxes, but subsidies. Otherwise, the ability of the government to help to make investments just stops. It all comes to a grinding halt. No society that is pulling back on its economic growth can keep piling more financial opportunity into the environment. I was an environmental engineer from MIT. I did it for 12 years.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: Mr. Sununu will have heard the argument from many people here that the economic impact is not seen. We have heard from the Central Statistics Office. Are there other external bodies, like the ESRI, or reports that show that economic activity has decreased since the cap was put in place? I know that has been discussed here already.

Mr. Willie Walsh: The cap has not been implemented.

Senator Nessa Cosgrove: I know that.

Mr. Willie Walsh: If we look at growth in GDP or GNI in Ireland, or whatever we think is the appropriate measure, it pretty much mirrors the growth in passengers at Dublin Airport. You could say that 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.

Deputy Gillian Toole: The learning from these opportunities is immeasurable, in my opinion, so I am grateful to be allowed to join the committee. I am not a member.

I am getting great hope from what Ms Embleton said. I sincerely hope that that piece of communication from early in 2025 can be shared with the committee, and then we can action that. That will be transformative.

Continuing on my learning journey, Mr. Wilson was speaking about next-generation aircraft being probably 50% quieter. I have an engineering friend with aeronautical expertise. Just so I am clear, I want to ensure my learning opportunity from this is beneficial and accurate. An engine test lab shows a 3 dB reduction in acoustic energy. If we take the human needs, a 10 dB reduction in perceived sound halves the loudness. God forbid that the correspondence cannot come to the committee, or that the flight path - the five nautical miles straight out from the north runway - is not implemented by Ryanair and Aer Lingus. In any case, the next-generation aircraft and the quietness are relevant to the community that I represent.

If anyone is on the ground around Coolquay or Kilcoskan, the current measurements are approximately 81 dB, and the target for nighttime, or L night, would be 45 dB. I have already referenced the health impacts. Is it 50% or is it just 19% that is the reduction for the quieter aircraft?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: No, for the quieter aircraft, based on the different fleets we have had with Boeing, from the 200s to the 800s and the MAX 10, there has been a 50% reduction on a per-passenger basis. I sympathise with the Deputy in terms of who she represents. However, no matter what way you go out of the airport, you have to fly over somebody's house. I am not being smart about that, but it is the reality. We have done our own noise surveys where there is an ambient level of 50 dB, whereas a washing machine is around 65 dB. When the aircraft are flying directly over some of these communities, it does not go above 53 dB or 54 dB. That is the information I have. This is a consequence of living near an airport. I am not being trite about that. There is no way of solving this. If people do not like aeroplanes and live near an airport, they are going to have interference.

Deputy Gillian Toole: I concur with Mr. Wilson entirely. I will always be solution-focused. I worked for an excellent guy, Roy McCabe of McCabe's Pharmacies, and my background is in healthcare. Come with the problem, but for God's sake, do not come without the solution. The solution here is quite simple. I know that in the bigger scheme of things, this may not seem important to the witnesses, particularly the US representatives, but from a community perspective, and to get that balance and meet the sustainability targets, it is a very simple thing. It is the removal of a logjam, and then all of the other points are taken on board, such as the increase in the use of SAF, the quieter aircraft and so on. When the simple thing is adherence to a flightpath, it is music to my ears that the witnesses today do not have objections. How do we move this simple thing forward? It will have a highly beneficial contributing effect to the passing of the Bill. It can sometimes be the simplest things, such as communication. If that piece of correspondence is admissible, it could be a game-changer. I like to keep it simple.

I am grateful to the Chair for letting me in, not being a member of the committee.

An Cathaoirleach: You are very welcome. I will come back to Mr. Wilson and Ms Embleton. They talk a lot about the public interest. Is it really about the public interest for them, or is it just about bigger profits for Ryanair and Aer Lingus at Dublin Airport?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: What is going on in Dublin is not unique. We come across this in airports in various different guises and at different states of maturity, where people accept what is happening at their local airport. In the last two years, we opened an airport in Calabria, which is-----

An Cathaoirleach: I am not sure Mr. Wilson is answering my question on profits.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: I am. In that particular situation, the representatives and all the local population would carry us shoulder-high through the streets because they have not been able to fly anywhere because their own Government has not put in any infrastructure. You get different maturities at different airports, where people want the connectivity and want to go on their holidays, but do not want aeroplanes to fly. In an urban environment, that is what happens. We look primarily at the demand that we have, and the wider strategic issues of cost and so on, to make a return on our business. It is as simple as that. We have to deal with issues like this.

An Cathaoirleach: Is it about the public interest or about profits for Aer Lingus?

Ms Lynne Embleton: Aer Lingus is part of IAG. IAG is a very successful airline group, and we are battling for aircraft. It has more choices than we can imagine about where to put aeroplanes and make profits. I am passionate about Ireland and passionate about Aer Lingus. I want Aer Lingus to grow. From a profit perspective, there are plenty of other places. There is a shortage of aircraft in the world, and a shortage of engines in the world. There are plenty of other places where airline groups can put aircraft. This is 100% in Ireland's hands to support the economy, support jobs and keep connectivity. This issue is critical. This is about the national interest. It is not about airline profits.

An Cathaoirleach: I will come back to the question of infrastructure. We have a planning application before Fingal County Council at the moment. I know it deals with the cap as well, but there is a lot of new infrastructure within that application. With regard to lifting the cap, that planning application will not be delivered until 2027 at the earliest, and that also applies to delivering the infrastructure within that application.

Could the witnesses comment on the existing infrastructure related to potential passenger growth between now and 2030, particularly in terms of infrastructural deficits, having regard to the points I made earlier on wastewater and other areas?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: The airport has not published the detail of what is in its capital expenditure programme. We are waiting to see that because the consultation process is a bit of a sham if the airport does not actually produce the detail.

An Cathaoirleach: Notwithstanding what is in that, has Mr. Wilson any concerns about existing infrastructure provision at Dublin Airport, the lifting of the cap and potential passenger growth between now and 2030?

Mr. Eddie Wilson: From Ryanair's point of view, there is only a marginal amount of infrastructure that we would look for. The existing infrastructure could be used in a much more efficient way. It does need to grow, but we would have a strong view on what that looks like.

Ms Lynne Embleton: The growth in capacity should not be influenced by an artificial cap. The infrastructure can take more passengers. Over time, we will need more infrastructure. There is a plan that has not yet been enacted but that has been in place for several years. We will need more stands and infrastructure over time, but that is normal life for an airport. The airport will develop and capacity will be released according to the stands and the ability of the airport. It should not be constrained by an artificial cap. The cap should go and then normal business should resume in terms of the airport and airport growth.

An Cathaoirleach: I have another question. I recently happened to be on an aircraft on the runway in Frankfurt at about 10 p.m. or 10.30 p.m. but it could not take off and we had to stay the night. Is there a curfew at certain European airports? We do not have a curfew. If there were a curfew preventing taking off and landing between 11 p.m. or 12 midnight and 4 o'clock or 5 o'clock in the morning at Dublin Airport, would it affect passenger growth? Such curfews do exist across Europe, certainly in Frankfurt.

Mr. Chris Sununu: It may be the case. I also represent cargo. It is a big time for cargo. FedEx, UPS and Atlas bring all the healthcare material, supplies and commercial goods in. That is a key point for them.

An Cathaoirleach: Could Mr. Stanton-Geddes state whether there are curfews at many European airports after a certain time at night?

Mr. Michael Stanton-Geddes: There are curfews at ten European airports.

An Cathaoirleach: Frankfurt just happened to be one of them.

Mr. Michael Stanton-Geddes: Frankfurt happens to be one of them. Remembering the levels of measures, an operating restriction would be the last place you would go. You should start by thinking about land use planning and consultation. There is a very small number with curfews.

Mr. Willie Walsh: In some places, the curfews can be set aside – for example, in Heathrow, in times-----

An Cathaoirleach: It is-----

Mr. Willie Walsh: No common approach is being adopted by airports. Under the balanced approach, requirements that would-----

Mr. Donal Moriarty: On that exact point, under the balanced approach we do not believe a curfew is required at Dublin Airport. There was a noise quota system established to give an envelope of noise within which each airline must comply. That has been complicated by An Coimisiún Pleanála's decision to add an overarching cap in terms of movements. The European Commission has determined that did not follow a balanced approach, so An Coimisiún Pleanála will have to re-examine that. A curfew is not the appropriate approach.

An Cathaoirleach: Just because I am asking the question does not necessarily mean I am advocating curfews. It is my job to scrutinise.

Rather than my making a long-winded closing statement, I will give each witness the opportunity to do a two-minute wrap-up on what we have discussed and his or her position regarding the lifting of the cap. I will go in reverse order, beginning with Mr. Wilson.

Mr. Eddie Wilson: While there are concerns about noise, the issue has become conflated with that of the cap. Wherever there is an airport, you hear this. It is very simple: the cap has to be lifted. We can see what is going to happen with growth at Dublin Airport. It is very easy to address this. Sixteen months on, the Government have not done anything about this. There has been emergency legislation in this country for many reasons, going back to the banking crisis. I remember insurance corporation legislation. All sorts of things were done overnight. That is what is required here. It is disastrous for this country if we do not get the cap lifted. If we do not, all the growth of our Irish-based airline will go elsewhere in Europe. The cap needs to be lifted to underpin the economic growth.

An Cathaoirleach: Are there a couple of crucial dates in the context of the timing? We are meeting twice per week to try to fast-track the pre-legislative scrutiny. We talked about 1 October in the context of examining the 2027 slots.

Mr. Willie Walsh: Slot allocation.

An Cathaoirleach: I am conscious that we are still waiting for the formal decision of the European Court of Justice. Does that have a bearing on other European courts? Could Mr. Walsh refer to that in his closing comments?

Mr. Willie Walsh: I am thankful for the opportunity. We believe this legislation is critical. The timing is also critical because of the decision-making timeframe airlines are considering. 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. Those assets may never come back. This is a significant risk to both Dublin and the Irish economy. Obtaining clarity on what will happen as soon as possible is required. September is probably the very latest that we could have this legislation enacted and in place.

Mr. Chris Sununu: Again, I thank the committee. I hear it is seeking to move quickly. Moving quickly is one of the biggest issues, not only for the airlines we represent but also the partners we have here in Europe. To be super clear, we are just as concerned as anybody about the potential retaliatory or rebalancing effects. We are not in favour of what could happen. My God, it would be devastating. My hope, when I go back across the pond, is to bring some good news. I believe I can in respect of taking the matter seriously and moving quickly.

On the question on the court, my understanding is that quick legislative action would effectively nullify what the court says. It would supersede it, the aim being to go forward, remove the cap and allow our carriers and probably every carrier in the world to plan into the 2027 season and do slot analysis with some confidence, as opposed to constricting what might be done.

We are trying to bring back as strong a message as we can. I very much appreciate that everyone is working on this. It is not easy. The passenger cap first related to traffic but now allows all the other issues to come into play. I refer to all the consideration of all those folks who live near airports.

Mr. Michael Stanton-Geddes: I thank the committee for the opportunity. I have two points, both of which have a bit of a story. Some of the questions were on who profits. Most ACI airports are not profit entities, so we try to align with the interests of the community. It did not come up that this is not just about airport and airline employees and ground handling. It is also about the Irish economy. Let me illustrate the value of the hub. I hope we can put this in writing for the Deputies who are here. I have Belgian and American passports. I connected via Dublin to go to Minneapolis last summer. I thank Ms Embleton for that flight. The flow was mostly of people working in the medical devices industry or for Minneapolis-based firms with operations in Ireland. Those firms will not expand in Ireland if they cannot have the direct flight. Therefore, this is about the Irish people.

What are Ireland's exports now? The figure for vaccines and serums is 21% and that for nucleic acids and their salts – I have no idea what these are – is 11%. The figure for hormones is 6%. This reflects Ireland's economy. Therefore, we are not talking about the aviation industry but about what the hub can offer for the people of Ireland across the island, working in industries like pharmaceuticals.

For my second story, I have seven seconds, so I will be quick. I bought a chicken mozzarella sandwich on the Ryanair flight yesterday. It had an expiry date of 27 November. I ate it when I bought it but it has a longer lifetime than this committee and the Irish Houses have to act to

deal with what we heard from Mr. Walsh about ensuring airlines plan correctly for the slots they hold today. There are big problems to come if-----

An Cathaoirleach: On that, is the critical date 1 October, or does that planning start before then, with a decision to be made on 1 October?

Mr. Willie Walsh: The Dublin decision in terms of the slot allocation is 1 October.

An Cathaoirleach: That is the decision.

Mr. Willie Walsh: The airlines are planning now.

An Cathaoirleach: A final word to Ms Embleton.

Ms Lynne Embleton: First, you cannot rely on the European Court nor on the planning permission at the DAA coming in. That is all happening too late. We need the legislation enacted before October because we are on the brink of cancelled trips, higher fares, lost jobs and economic harm. We urge the Government and this committee to support the very fast enactment of the legislation.

Mr. Donal Moriarty: It is not just the legislation enacted. We need it commenced and the ministerial order, under the legislation, issued before 1 October.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank all the witnesses for their engagement, and not just today, in the context of their detailed submissions. As part of this process we have 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 exceptions of the airlines which were between three and five pages. I thank the members who have left and I thank Deputy Toole who has remained. I also thank the individuals in the Public Gallery.

Next week, we have a recess but we have two meetings scheduled for the following week to conclude. We will meet a number of key business and tourism organisations, and a number of NGOs and thereafter conclude our report on the proposed legislation.

Thank you all. The meeting now stands adjourned until Tuesday, 14 April when we will meet at 6 p.m. in public session.

The joint committee adjourned at 11.52 a.m. until 6 p.m. on Tuesday, 14 April 2016.