



THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT



FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE

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The Rt Hon Tom King MP
Secretary of State for Defence
Ministry of Defence
Main Building
Whitehall
LONDON
SW1A 2HB

My Ref:

Your Ref:

16 NOV 1990

Dear Sir,
will request if required

Following the interim reply you sent me on 7 June, my officials have been continuing to discuss with yours the long-running issue of the future of RAF Northolt and the possibility of improved facilities for business aviation there. I understand progress has now been made on identifying a cheaper solution to the problem of road access that was causing you concern.

There has been no change in our policy towards business aviation. As the gap between demand for airport capacity in the South East and its supply continues to widen, and as the level of activity in the business aviation sector rises, we are coming under increasing pressure to provide more facilities for it at airfields in or on the periphery of London. The imminence of the single European market adds another dimension to the economic benefits that could flow from a thriving business aviation sector operating out of well-equipped and suitably located airports.

I understand it to be your view that the Ministry of Defence now has more airfield capacity than is needed for military purposes. It does seem to me that the Government ought to be considering whether a match can be found between the shortage of capacity for business aviation and the surplus capacity for defence.

My concern is that London does not get left behind by other European capitals in the efficiency of access and mobility that it can offer businessmen. Paris, Le Bourget, is the classic example of special efforts being made to provide an airport dedicated to business use. There are many obstacles which would prevent development of Northolt on the same scale as Le Bourget, and in any event London extends over a wider area than Paris. I acknowledge that we shall have to continue

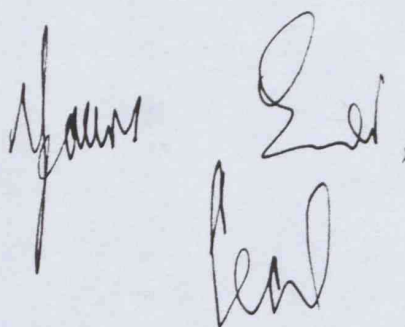
to look to a ring of airfields to cater for business needs overall in the London area, but of all the airfields Northolt offers the quickest road access to Central London and I feel strongly that we should be considering whether it could accommodate more business traffic than it does at present.

I accept that for the time being there will continue to be air traffic control constraints at Northolt, which could restrict any increase in the total number of movements. I also recognise the need to safeguard the use of Northolt for flights by Royalty and by other VIPs, and to ensure appropriate security. But neither of these considerations need prevent us from opening up Northolt to some increased civil usage in the short term; and in the longer term, once planned ATC improvements have come into effect in 1995, there may be the opportunity for a more intensive use of the airfield.

We know that the business aviation community would welcome an initiative on Northolt. The 1985 White Paper on Airports Policy spoke of enhancing the facilities for business aviation there, and as I said when I wrote to you on 7 March, we may well be accused of bad faith if we do not move things along soon.

Given the increased awareness of the inadequacy of existing facilities for business aviation, the approach of the single European market, and the changes taking place in the defence environment, this seems a most opportune time to review the use of Northolt. If you agree, I suggest that we meet very soon to discuss the best way forward.

/ I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, as well as to Peter Lilley and Chris Patten.

The block contains three handwritten signatures in dark ink. The signature on the left is 'Spencer'. The signature in the middle is 'Cecil', with a large, stylized 'C'. The signature on the right is 'Patten'.

CECIL PARKINSON

