

Written evidence from Atlantic Star Airlines

Summary

Atlantic Star Airlines was set up in 2005 to offer an air service between St Helena and the rest of the world, and the company has been actively involved in the proposal to bring flights to St. Helena ever since. The problems in commencing flights in and out of St Helena Airport have been well publicised in recent months, with BBC News and leading newspapers running coverage of the delays to the air service. Atlantic Star want to save money for the British taxpayer, and stimulate investment to St Helena, by operating an interim air service whilst the wider problems surrounding the airport (for example concerning wind shear) are resolved.

Atlantic Star further proposes a long term solution that will mitigate the operational impact of the local windshear phenomenon.

Background

Atlantic Star Airlines is a British company founded by three former and present commercial airline pilots. Personnel include experienced airline managers, pilots, regulatory experts, marketing professionals and accountants. The company's breadth of technical expertise and business acumen, honed over the many years we have been examining the particular challenges and complexities of flying to St. Helena, makes Atlantic Star the perfect airline to link St. Helena to the outside world.

After having spent £285 million of British taxpayers' money on a new airport, air services were due to commence in and out of St Helena in May 2016. This has, however, been delayed seemingly indefinitely due to a series of errors and miscalculations surrounding wind shear and landing conditions. The British Government is now in a situation where it is having to pay out compensation as a result of delays to the air service, it has had to extend the operating contract for the RMS St Helena (which remains the only way of getting to the island), and desperate residents on St Helena remain in a state of limbo over the future of the air service.

A viable interim solution

Atlantic Star has developed an interim solution to the problems outlined above that is workable, affordable and realistic. Costed on a monthly basis, the proposal that we have produced sets out how St Helena could offer flights on a short term basis whilst the ongoing situation over the airport is resolved. Full details of this proposal are set out in Appendix A below.

The interim solution proposed would use an AVRO RJ100 aircraft to link St Helena to Ascension Island, with connection to the UK on the Falklands Airbridge. This service is operated by the MoD, carries civilian passengers and has spare seat capacity. The RJ100 is a four-engine aircraft manufactured by the British firm BAE Systems, and is specifically designed for short take-off and landing operations in challenging environments.

Atlantic Star arranged to fly into St Helena Airport (from Zurich via Ascension Island) on Friday 21 October. The operation was a success, with the aircraft landing first time on runway 02 following a southern approach with a tail wind of approx. 6 knots, requiring only 780 metres out of the 1550 metre runway.

Fifteen minutes later, having disembarked most of the 13 non-commercial passengers, the aircraft taxied back out onto the runway, took off, circled round and this time landed from the opposite end on runway 20.

This is the northern approach which has been plagued by wind shear. In cross winds of approx. 18 knots and some turbulence the landing was completed without a problem.

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Now that a successful ferry-flight has landed as a test of the RJ100's suitability, Atlantic Star will soon be in a position to roll out the service and offer flights through the week. This will, however, require decisive action by the Department for International Development (DfID). It is hoped that the Department will recognise the significant benefits of supporting Atlantic Star's interim solution whilst the wider problems surrounding the airport are resolved.

Conclusions

- DfID should proceed with Atlantic Star's proposed interim air service, not least because this will save the British taxpayer money that would otherwise be spent having to extend, yet further, the life of the RMS St Helena
- Atlantic Star has demonstrated that its interim solution is viable and has been fully costed. With decisive action from the Department, an air service could commence within months

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Appendix A

AVRO RJ100

Presented by

Atlantic Star Airlines Alliance

HISTORY OF THE AVRO RJ100

The BAE146/Avro RJ100 was conceived as a regional airliner by British Aerospace (now BAE Systems) with production of the type totaling 387 aircraft making it the most successful airliner programme in the history of British aviation.

Production of the AVRO RJ70/85/100 series ran from 1993 to 2003 and 100 of these aircraft remain in service around the world today with airlines including Air France City Jet, Brussels Airlines, Swiss and Royal Air Force Queen's Flight.

The RJ100 aircraft in standard configuration can seat up to 100 passengers in either a 5 or 6 abreast cabin configuration and offer an operating range of up to 1600 nautical miles.

Key features of the aircraft include:

- 4 engines
- High Wing and T-Tail
- Tail mounted air brake
- Low noise footprint
- Carbon brakes

These features have made the RJ100 very popular with airline operators wishing to operate into airfields requiring steep approaches onto short runways (including British Airways CityFlyer into London City Airport). The aircraft configuration and aerodynamic properties also give it excellent stability in challenging operating environments such as Vagar in the Faroe Islands where Atlantic Airways (national airline of The Faroes) have been able to maintain safe operations using the RJ100 in the extreme weather conditions found at their home base.

AVRO RJ100 FOR ST.HELENA

The Avro RJ100 has key characteristics not found in other aircraft types that make it ideally suited to operations on St.Helena:

Four engines provide greater reliability and excellent take-off or go-around performance. In the event of engine failure the aircraft can be flown empty on three engines allowing transit to a maintenance base for repairs. Twin engined aircraft cannot do this.

Carbon brakes deliver high performance braking on short runways. The AVRO RJ100 has as standard a 15-knot landing tailwind limit delivering good performance on Runway 02 at St.Helena whilst most competitor aircraft have a maximum of 10 knots.

Tail mounted air brake and full width wing spoilers deliver stability in windy conditions and deliver for short landing distances without the need for thrust reversers.

High wing, T-tail and lack of winglets make the aircraft aerodynamically stable when encountering changing wind conditions in comparison with other types such as Boeing 737 or Airbus 319. Engine pod scrape considerations associated with high bank angles in crosswind conditions are eliminated by the high wing configuration.

Trailing link undercarriage permits firm touchdowns to guarantee landing performance on short runways without compromising passenger comfort.

All of the above are delivered at an operating price that is less than 50% of rival aircraft such as Embraer 190 or Airbus 319. The reason for this is the relative simplicity of the AVRO RJ100 making it less expensive to own but with slightly higher fuel burn on each flight. In the St.Helena environment where aircraft utilisation will be as low as ten flights per week operations can be delivered competitively with a dedicated aircraft based on St.Helena around the clock.

The standard AVRO RJ100 aircraft will be able to land with up to 50 passengers on Runway 02 and operate to Ascension Island with a 2-hour flight time. Operations beyond Ascension Island to Accra can also be explored. The AVRO RJ100 will also be capable of carrying out medical Evacuations to South Africa via Walvis Bay at a lower cost than current arrangements.

An "Extended Range" variant of the AVRO RJ100 has been designed by original equipment manufacturer BAE Systems with the intention that current RJ100 aircraft can be modified to include extra fuel tanks within part of the baggage holds to deliver the extra operating range required by operations to St.Helena. With this Extended Range variant flights could be carried out to Walvis Bay, Cape Town, Johannesburg and elsewhere.

ATLANTIC STAR ALLIANCE PARTNERS

The team at Atlantic Star are well known to Saints and other stakeholders interested in the future of St.Helena and the tourism industry on the island. Atlantic Star is privately financed and had successfully launched a series of charter flights between the UK and St.Helena when the windshear issues associated with operations at St.Helena first became known. As a consequence those flights were cancelled as the chosen aircraft type for the operation, a Boeing 737-800, is unsuitable for operations avoiding windshear using Runway 02. Despite this setback Atlantic Star remain committed to the future of the island and have been working continuously since cancellation to develop a new strategy that will deliver safe and efficient flights for St.Helena that will help the island develop and move forward.

Tronos Leasing have been specialising in BAE146/AVRO RJ sales, leasing and maintenance since 2001. The team at Tronos have an unrivalled experience in operating these rugged, dependable and versatile aircraft in a variety of challenging environments around the globe in passenger, freighter and fire bomber roles. The Tronos portfolio is in excess of 20 aircraft and as such access to spares and maintenance expertise is guaranteed. Tronos Chairman Adrian Noskwith has been working in British Aviation for more than 60 years and has added his personal backing to the Atlantic Star Alliance by travelling with the team on the ferry flight to experience St.Helena first hand.

Jota Aviation is a specialist UK charter airline that has been operating from its base at London Southend since 2009 with a total of 7 aircraft including a pair of BAE146/AVRO RJ jets. Jota has a UK Civil Aviation Authority Type A operating licence and has specific experience in delivering safe and reliable operations in a variety of environments to exacting customer standards. One example of this is support for the British Airways CityFlyer operation from London City Airport where Jota regularly operates on behalf of BA C-F using the AVRO RJ to carry out steep approaches onto the short runway at London City.

For more information on each partner visit:

www.atlanticstarairlines.com

www.tronosjet.com

www.jotagroup.com

SUMMARY

Atlantic Star Alliance has the right aircraft, expertise and capability to deliver safe and efficient air access for St.Helena. The AVRO RJ100 from Tronos is able to deploy to St.Helena quickly to provide the immediate link to the outside world that the island needs and also begin to build real world data on flight operations on both runways at St.Helena airport. Flights to Ascension Island and on to London will be available immediately. Flights from Ascension on to Accra are also a possibility. 24/7 Medevac capabilities to Johannesburg will be assured.

BAE Systems are able to deliver an extended range AVRO RJ100 that will further enhance the Atlantic Star Alliance proposal by adding flights to Walvis bay, Windhoek, Johannesburg, Cape Town and beyond as the tourism market on St.Helena develops.

The above is available using a British aircraft, a British airline and a British delivery team to solve the issues created by the windshear phenomenon at St.Helena in a safe, timely and efficient way.