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Potential impacts of the drop-off/pick-up zone at Belfast International Airport

1 Background

Belfast International Airport (BIA) has been the most recent UK airport to introduce a drop-off charge. From 7th July 2010 the airport began charging a £1 fee to use the new drop-off/pick-up zone. A maximum time of 10 minutes is allowed before motorists have to move out of the zone and pay to park elsewhere. A sign at the zone barrier states that cars staying longer than 10 minutes will be clamped, with an £80 release fee, and cars left unattended will be removed.

A spokesperson from the airport said that they had invested heavily in the zone in response to new government guidelines after the Glasgow airport bombing, which insisted on increasing the minimum distance between the terminal and vehicle zones¹.

According to information supplied by the Consumer Council, while Belfast International Airport is not alone in levying a drop-off/pick-up charge in the UK (Luton, Birmingham

¹ BBC News website. 2010. 'Belfast International Airport - new £1 drop off charge': <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10464896>
Accessed 21 July 2010

and East Midlands airports also charge a fee and Edinburgh is considering introducing one), at the time of launch BIA was the only UK airport to impose an unavoidable fee. Luton, Birmingham and East Midlands are cited in a number of news articles as having a similar fee to Belfast, but passengers can avoid the fee if they are dropped off at a long stay car park and then walk or take a shuttle bus to the terminal. As of 7th July, passengers at BIA did not have this option. However, these arrangements have now been revised, and a 10 minute grace period has been created within the long stay car park.

Glasgow Airport, which opened its new drop-off zone on 8th June 2010 as a response to the attempted terrorist attack there in 2007, has chosen not to charge for use of the zone.

Annexe 1 shows drop-off/pick-up charges across most UK airports, and the provision made for passengers with reduced mobility. Annexe 2 contains a map of the revised layout of Belfast International Airport, including the new drop-off/pick-up zone.

2 Main Issues

Grace period

The Consumer Council has openly expressed its concern regarding the introduction of this new scheme, and has lobbied BIA on this decision. According to the Consumer Council, although the decision is ultimately a commercial one, their role is to represent all passengers flying into or out of Northern Ireland. They had asked the airport to consider other options such as a minimum 'grace period' for dropping off/picking up with no charge (as is the case at a number of other UK airports), or alternatively to dedicate a zone for free drop-off/pick-up within one of the other car parks. To strengthen their case, the Consumer Council stated that they are keen to hear from as many consumers as possible to find out whether the £1 charge will affect their travel plans, and how they will access the airport.

On 17th July, BIA revised the information on its website, adding that 'a short grace period exists in the airport long stay car park for those wishing to drop passengers'². In a Press Statement on 30th June, the Consumer Council claims that BIA can potentially generate revenue of £2.3 million per year. One of the main concerns expressed by the Consumer Council is the potential increase in congestion with many customers dropping off and picking up on the surrounding roads to avoid the charge.

² Belfast International Airport website. 'Meeting and Greeting': <http://www.belfastairport.com/en/content/2/1528/meeting-and-greeting.html>. Accessed 23 July 2010.

Environmental impact

The experience of other airports has been that the creation of a drop-off/pick-up charge may increase traffic congestion, either through vehicles queuing to pass through the barrier, or the slowing of traffic as cars park by the side of the road and wait prior to reaching the barrier. *The Sunday Times* reported that following the introduction of a £1 drop-off zone charge at Luton Airport in July 2009, traffic congestion tailed back 'for more than a mile beyond the airport perimeter'³.

Congested traffic with frequent acceleration/deceleration events has been shown to make a greater contribution to air pollution than smooth-flowing traffic⁴. This is for two main reasons. Firstly, congested traffic means that vehicles spend longer on the road, thereby emitting greater quantities of carbon dioxide and other polluting gases. Secondly, vehicle speed is closely correlated with fuel efficiency, so that at very low or very high speeds cars emit greater quantities of carbon dioxide. When a vehicle is travelling at an average speed of less than five miles per hour, it can emit carbon dioxide at a rate of over 1000 grams per mile (g/mi), compared with less than 600 g/mi at 15 mph, and less than 400 g/mi at 20 mph.

Beyond the issue of carbon dioxide, other gases and substances are emitted by motor vehicles which can be harmful to human health, particularly to pedestrians nearby. Nitrogen dioxide, nitric oxide, sulphur dioxide, and particulate matter have been shown in studies in Canada⁵ and the Netherlands⁶ to cause or worsen respiratory diseases such as asthma and bronchitis, particularly in cases of long-term exposure. Airport workers and frequent users of the airport facilities may be at increased risk of respiratory disease if traffic is particularly congested.

However, it is not yet clear what the long-term impact of the drop-off/pick-up zone and barrier will be on traffic patterns in and around the airport terminal. A spokesperson from Luton Airport commented shortly after the introduction of their drop-off scheme that congestion could clear after a period of one to six months, and that they regarded clear, accessible information via signposts and the website as an important tool in minimising disruption. The Consumer Council has said that its research showed that over half of all Northern Ireland air passengers get a lift or take a taxi to and from the airport⁷. It may take some time for this behaviour to change.

³ Haslam, C. 2009. 'Luton airport misery as drop-off fee causes chaos', *The Sunday Times*.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/travel/news/article6632936.ece> Accessed 20 July 2010

⁴ Barth, M & Boriboonsomsin, K. 2008. 'Real-world carbon dioxide impacts of traffic congestion'. *Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board*: 10.3141/2058-20: 163-171

⁵ Buckeridge, DL, Glazier, R, Harvey, BJ, Escobar, M, Amrhein, C & Frank, J. 2002. 'Effect of motor vehicle emissions on respiratory health in an urban area', *Environ Health Perspect*: March 110(3): 293-300.

⁶ Brunekreef B, Beelen R, Hoek G, Schouten L, Bausch-Goldbohm S, Fischer P, Armstrong B, Hughes E, Jerrett M, van den Brandt P. 2009. 'Effects of long-term exposure to traffic-related air pollution on respiratory and cardiovascular mortality in the Netherlands: the NLCS-AIR study.' *Res Rep Health Eff Inst*. Mar (139): 5-89

⁷ BBC News website. '£1 charge at Belfast International Airport criticised': <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10472739> Accessed 21 July 2010.

Conversely, it is conceivable that the introduction of a £1 drop-off charge may increase use of the airport bus. This may in fact have a positive environmental impact as fewer vehicles approach the airport terminal, thus potentially improving air quality.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change comments that, 'convincing people to switch from automobiles to buses or trains can dramatically reduce primary energy use per passenger-seat-kilometre'⁸. A recent comparative study of different transport options has stated that 'the bus is the most viable form of urban transport and has a major role to play in the delivery of sustainable transport objectives'⁹. On average, the 20km journey from Belfast city centre to Belfast International Airport will emit 2.6kg of carbon dioxide travelling in a small car and 5.6kg in a large car. This compares with 2.1kg by bus (based on average figures for bus miles per gallon and a typical number of passengers)¹⁰. In general terms, once bus occupancy exceeds three passengers, greenhouse gas emissions per passenger-kilometre are lower than for cars, so the greater the number of passengers, the more positive the comparison in favour of bus transport¹¹.

Currently, no studies are available of airport bus systems specifically. However, a study of the London congestion charge has suggested that following the introduction of a £5 charge to enter the restricted zone in 2003, congestion fell by 30% in the first year, and overall traffic levels within the charging zone fell by 16%, in large part due to a reduction in car use within the zone¹². The assumption that bus travel to and from the airport will increase depends on a number of factors including availability, cost, and the quality of transport links to the airport bus route. An increase in bus capacity was seen as the driving force behind the success of the congestion charging scheme. Prior to the start date of the London congestion charge on 17th February 2003, Transport for London increased the provision of buses by 19%, added some new bus routes, and made adjustments to the traffic flow of the Inner Ring Road and radial routes to accommodate heavier road use outside the charge zone¹³.

Further scrutiny of BIA's contingency planning with regard to bus provision in the light of the drop-off/pick-up zone may be useful.

⁸ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. 'Climate Change Information Sheet 26: New Transportation Technologies and Policies':

http://unfccc.int/essential_background/background_publications_htmlpdf/climate_change_information_kit/items/284.php
Accessed 20.7.10

⁹ Chapman, L (2007) 'Transport and climate change: a review', *Journal of Transport Geography* 15 (5): 354-367, citing Bentley, R. 'Sustainable transport: the role of the bus in the post-competitive market', *Transport Reviews* 18: 199-213.

¹⁰ Transport Direct Carbon Calculator: <http://www.transportdirect.info/web2/JourneyPlanning/JourneyEmissionsCompare.aspx>
Accessed 20.7.10

¹¹ Stanley, J & Watkiss, P. 2003. 'Transport energy and emissions: buses', in DA Hensher and KJ Button (eds) *Handbooks in Transport 4: Handbook of Transport and the Environment*, Elsevier: 227-246.

¹² Santos, G & Shaffer, B. 2004. 'Preliminary results of the London congestion Charging Scheme', *Public Works Management & Policy* 9: pp164, 169

¹³ Santos, G & Shaffer, B. 2004. 'Preliminary results of the London congestion Charging Scheme', *Public Works Management & Policy* 9: p171

Passengers with a greater need to use the drop-off zone

Further concerns have been raised about airport drop-off/pick-up zones regarding their impact on particular social groups, notably those with disabilities, the elderly, and those travelling with young children.

For disabled passengers, once inside the zone they can make use of special wide parking spaces and press a 'help' button to summon assistance. However, there is no option of avoiding the £1 drop-off fee, even if they have a blue badge. Their nearest option of free parking is the long stay car park, or they are entitled to a discounted rate within the short stay car park. By contrast, at Luton Airport free car parking is provided for blue badge holders just outside the drop-off zone at the front of the short stay car park. At Birmingham Airport, blue badge holders are entitled to up to 60 minutes free parking within the drop-off zone. At airports operating without a drop-off charge, free parking provision for blue badge holders very close to the airport terminal is the norm.

Annexe 1 contains comparative details of drop-off arrangements for those with disabilities. Such arrangements are now covered by European Directive 1107/2006, Clause 4 of which states that,

*'in order to give disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility opportunities for air travel comparable to those of other citizens, assistance to meet their particular needs should be provided at the airport as well as on board aircraft, by employing the necessary staff and equipment. In the interests of social inclusion, the persons concerned should receive this assistance without additional charge.'*¹⁴

A code of practice exists covering access to air travel for those with reduced mobility in UK airports. This makes detailed recommendations about the nature of ticket barriers, payment arrangements and car parking access¹⁵. Although it does not make specific reference to drop-off/pick-up zones (since none existed at the time of its publication), further scrutiny of whether the new BIA arrangements conform to the Code of Practice may be required.

For other groups with an increased need to drop-off or pick-up close to the airport, such as families or carers with small children and the elderly, concerns have been expressed that the £1 charge is unfair. Edinburgh Airport has announced plans to introduce a similar chargeable drop-off/pick-up zone in October 2010. Gavin Brown MSP has commented that 'for many people, including older residents and those with

¹⁴ 'Regulation (EC) No 1107/2006 of the European Parliament and of the council of 5 July 2006 concerning the rights of disabled persons and persons with reduced mobility when travelling by air'. *Official Journal of the European Union*.

¹⁵ Department for Transport. 2008. *Access to Air Travel for Disabled Persons and Persons with Reduced Mobility – Code of Practice*.

young families, taking public transport to the airport is not a viable option¹⁶. He has launched a petition in opposition to the plans.

The Consumer Council has highlighted safety concerns as the number of passengers with luggage walking to and from the terminal may increase¹⁷. For people travelling with small children or with limited mobility, such journeys on foot may carry increased risk, particularly if the traffic is congested or they are walking long distances.

¹⁶ The Scotsman website. 'Thousands urged to sign petition against Edinburgh Airport drop-off fee': <http://thescotsman.scotsman.com/scotland/Thousands-urged-to-sign-petition.6401850.jp?CommentPage=1&CommentPageLength=1000> Accessed 23 July 2010.

¹⁷ Consumer Council's Statement, 'Belfast's International Airport £1 Drop Off Charge: 30 June 2010' <http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/newsroom/605>

Annexe 1: Drop-off/pick-up charges at UK airports¹

Airport	Charge to drop off passengers at terminal	Priority Lane/Fast Track System	Charge for baggage trolleys	Charge for plastic bags	Blue badge parking
Aberdeen Airport	Free in the dedicated drop-off area in the terminal forecourt.	Not available	Free of charge	Free of charge	Blue/orange badge parking is available at the front of the multi storey car park opposite the terminal building.
	£1.00 for 15 minutes in the short stay car park.				
Birmingham Airport	£1.00 for 15 minutes outside the terminal in the Drop and Go car park.	Not available	£1.00	£1.00 for three bags	Up to 60 minutes free parking within the Drop & Go area on production of blue badge and car parking ticket.
	£2.00 for 30 minutes in the Drop and Go car park.				
Bristol Airport	Free for 10 minutes in the Drop Off/Pick Up car park.	Dedicated priority security channel available at the airport for £5.00	£1.00	£1.00 for four bags	Special assistance bays provided in all car parks.
	£2.50 for 10 - 30 minutes in the Drop Off/Pick Up car park.				
Cardiff Airport	Free for 20 minutes in the short stay car park.	Not available	Free of charge	Free at the information desk	Dedicated parking spaces available in both the short and long stay car parks, and free drop-off at the terminal entrance.
	£2.00 for 20 – 40 minutes in the short stay car park.				
Doncaster Airport	Free for 15 minutes in the short stay car park.	Not available	£1.00 refunded when the trolley is returned	50p for two bags	A pick-up and set-down area is available outside the terminal entrance. Parking spaces for passengers with disabilities are reserved at the front of the airport car park.
	£2.00 for 15 - 30 minutes in the short stay car park.				

¹ Most information derives from the Consumer Council, with blue badge parking arrangements gleaned from a trawl of UK airport websites.

Durham Tees Valley	Free for 15 minutes in the short stay car park.	Not available	£1.00 refunded when the trolley is returned	50p for two bags	Parking bays, allocated for blue-badge holders, located close to the terminal in the Park and Stay car park.
	£1.00 for 15 - 20 minutes in the short stay car park.				
East Midlands Airport	£1.00 for 10 minutes in the drop-off zone.	Not available	Free of charge	50p for two bags	Parking spaces in the short stay car park. In the long stay car parks, free coach service to the terminal building. Vehicles are no longer able to park at the front of the terminal building.
	£2.00 for 30 minutes in the short stay car park.				
Edinburgh Airport	Free in the Set Down Zone.	Not available	Free of charge	Free of charge	Blue badge holders given 30 minutes free access to the ground floor of the pick-up zone.
	If picking up passengers must go to short stay park. £1.50 for 15 minutes.				
Exeter Airport	Does not allow drop-off or pick-up in front of the terminal. Free for 15 minutes in the short stay car park.	Not available	Free of charge	£1.00 for four bags	Blue badge holders can use short stay designated bays for unloading baggage and drop-off, before re-parking in long stay.
	70p for 15 - 30 minutes in the short stay car park.				
Gatwick Airport	Free for 10 minutes in designated areas on terminal forecourt but there is a no waiting policy.	Not available	£1.00 refunded when the trolley is returned	Free of charge	Blue badge parking is available in the short stay car parks at both terminals, though this must be paid for. Help with baggage is available via telephone help points.
	Pick-up from short stay car park. £1.00 for 15 minutes.				
Glasgow Airport	Free drop-off and pick-up zone opposite main terminal on ground floor of Short Stay Car Park 2.	Not available	Free of charge	Free of charge	Blue badge holders have access to ground floor of Car Park 2, directly opposite the

	Free to stay for up to 10 minutes.				terminal. Presenting the car park ticket to the customer service desk gets up to 30 minutes free access.
	£5.00 for 10 - 15 minutes in the drop-off area.				
Heathrow Airport	Free for 10 minutes in designated areas on terminal forecourt but there is a no waiting policy.	Not available	Free of charge	Free of charge	Free provision in all short and long stay car parks.
	£2.40 for up to 30 minutes in short stay car park.				
Leeds Bradford Airport	Drop off area 150 yards from terminal. Free for 5 minutes for rapid drop off in the Drop Off and Pick Up zone.	£3 (takes passengers to a dedicated scanner for their use only)	£1.00	50p for two bags	Free provision in all areas, including drop-off zone.
	£2.50 up to 20 minutes in the Drop Off and Pick Up zone.				
Liverpool Airport	Free for 10 minutes in the Drop Off Only car park.	£3 Fast Lane Ticket (takes passengers to a dedicated scanner for their use only). Free Fast Lane ticket available when purchased with parking in the Long Stay and Premium Car Park.	£1.00 refunded when the trolley is returned	50p for two bags	Free provision in all areas, including drop-off zone
	£2.00 for each additional 10 minutes thereafter in the Drop Off Only car park.				
Luton Airport	£1.00 for 10 minutes in the Drop Off Zone.	£3 (allows passengers to jump to the front of the security queue)	£1.00	£1.00 for four bags	Free parking provided for blue badge holders just outside the drop-off zone at the front of the short stay car park
	£5.00 for 10 – 15 minutes in the Drop Off Zone. £25.00 for longer than 15 minutes.				
Manchester Airport	Free of charge. There is a no waiting policy for all areas around the terminal.	Fast lane system available for business class passengers only.	£1.00 refunded when the trolley is returned	£1.00 for two bags – trial in Terminal 1 until the end of May.	Blue badge zones are located in the short and long stay car parks, but no specific disabled

	£2.00 for up to 30 minutes in the short stay car park.				spaces are supplied in the drop-off or pick-up zones.
Newcastle Airport	Free for 5 minutes in the short stay car park.	Not available	Free of charge	Free of charge	Disabled parking bays provided in both the drop-off and pick-up points, and the short stay car park, with assistance points. If longer than 5 minutes is required in the drop-off zone, the Passenger Assistance desk can be called.
	£1.00 for 5 – 20 minutes in the 'pick-up and drop-off' car park.				
Prestwick Airport	Free for 5 minutes in the short stay car park. Only emergency vehicles permitted to park in front of the terminal.	Not available	Free of charge	£1.00 for four bags	Free provision in all areas, including drop-off zone.
	£1.00 for 5 – 15 minutes in short stay car park.				
Southampton Airport	Free for 10 minutes to be dropped off in designated areas on terminal forecourt but there is a no waiting policy.	Not available	Free of charge	Free of charge	Available in short stay car park located close to access route to the terminal, and in the long-term car park close to the shuttle bus stops.
	£2.20 for 10 – 30 minutes in the short stay car park.				
Stansted Airport	Free Set Down of passengers in designated areas on terminal forecourt but there is a no waiting policy.	Not available	£1.00 refunded when the trolley is returned	Free of charge	Free provision in all areas, including drop-off zone.
	£2.00 for 15 minutes in the pick-up zone in the short stay car park. £2.50 for 0 – 30 minutes in the short stay car park.				

