

Stormont backs airlines with £4.5M fund to bolster connectivity

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The Northern Ireland Executive has set up a fund of £4.5 million to maintain and grow flight connectivity with Great Britain.

The NI Domestic Aviation Kickstart Scheme (NIDAKS) is designed to incentivise airlines operating or considering operating flights to Great Britain from Northern Ireland's three main airports.

The move follows the removal of some Northern Ireland-to-Great Britain routes during the Covid-19 pandemic and a reduction in the frequency of other routes as a result of a slump in demand.

With movement restrictions lifting, Stormont hopes its new funding scheme will be enough to persuade airlines to up the number of flights they run between the two destinations or, at the very least, prevent airlines from reducing frequency.

It sees regular and widespread air connectivity between Northern Ireland and Great Britain as a key ingredient in the recovery of the economy.

Economy Minister Paul Frew good air connectivity is critical.

“I am pleased to announce NIDAKS, which has three elements – maintaining a minimum route frequency on a core network of domestic routes, incentivising enhanced frequency on those routes above the minimum, and encouraging new routes which are economically important to NI.

“This improved connectivity will stimulate inbound tourism, as well as both inward and outward business travel. In turn we hope to see a positive impact on local hotels, restaurants and other hospitality and tourism businesses, as the sector here continues to get back on its feet.

“Furthermore, enhancing our links with Great Britain can only help make Northern Ireland even more attractive as a place to invest.”

The NIDAKS will be administered by Invest Northern Ireland on behalf of the Department for the Economy. The financial assistance is time bound between 1 June and 31 October 2021.

The chief executives of all three Northern Ireland airports – Belfast City Airport, Belfast International Airport and Derry City Airport – all welcomed the move

Graham Keddie, Managing Director of Belfast International Airport, said the announcement “demonstrates the value of having a local Executive in place that listens to and engages with the business community.”



Economy Minister Paul Frew with Graham Keddie, Managing Director of Belfast International Airport.

Steve Frazer, Managing Director of City of Derry Airport, said he was pleased the “NI Executive Ministers have provided a further catalyst for the recovery of NI’s economy in the form of the NIDAKS” while Brian Ambrose, Chief Executive of George Best Belfast City Airport, said “the Northern Ireland Executive recognised the importance of our airports as key infrastructure and provided welcome financial support so we could hit the ground running when the time was right.”