

# Do we need a National Aviation Policy?

Aviation is going through traumatic times, not only here in Mauritius but worldwide. We are by no means the only nation which fears diminishing or even losing its national carrier, several airlines in other countries have already gone to the wall, and those companies which will survive are all busily downsizing their passenger operations, if only temporarily. This is a painful process affecting thousands of dedicated people and their families. It is also near-disastrous for a country's economic development, especially those for which tourism has been a traditional pillar of the economy. Airline stakeholders, whether in the public or private sectors, are struggling to second-guess the future, and one or two countries (conscious of pressures to reduce CO2 emissions), are keen to make surface transport take some of the air share of the total travel market. For remote island nations like our own, there is no such choice.

External communication is of vital importance to the national interest of every nation (even North Korea, did they but recognize it). This need for a fluid connection with the rest of the world is of particular importance to geographically remote islands such as Mauritius. Why? For the flow of vital imports and exports, and for business or leisure passenger travel including inbound tourism; and for the important purpose of ensuring that Mauritius has a recognized place in the UN family of nations.

WHY a "national" policy? Because a cohesive approach to building aviation's contribution to the national economy will only be maximized when the different sectors of this important industry work together for the common good of the nation. Fragmented efforts by airport, air-

line, aviation training, aircraft maintenance and the tourism and hospitality industry – each with a different agenda and company vision – are likely to be counterproductive, with one branch simply 'milking' another. (An example is found in airport charges as applied to a national carrier).

WHAT should be the contents of a "National Aviation Policy"? As preamble to the answers it must be recognized that, for the sector to act as a strong developer of the economy, a policy framework must be incorporated for sustained growth and in order to meet unexpected challenges. It must be aligned with ICAO strategic objectives relating to safety, air navigation capacity and efficiency, security, passenger facilitation, economic development, aircraft manufacturing, licensing, maintenance & repair and the protection of the environment. Chapters of the NAP document should cover the whole value chain of the Aviation/Aerospace industry, consisting of the regulatory authority, airports, airlines/operators, flying schools/ATOs and flying clubs, MROs (maintenance organizations), ground handlers and human resources, all synchronized for the growth of safe travel and profitable tourism and of the national economy at large.

WITHOUT an autonomous and professional Civil Aviation AUTHORITY, how can safety and the optimum level of airline competition be assured? The answer is that it cannot, and recent experience of the granting of foreign airline landing rights has shown how out-of-control



**DICK TWOMEY**

(Captain Twomey is a previous director of Flight Operations of Air Mauritius. After a 30-year career as pilot and later General Manager of British Airways in Germany, he left BA to establish a new regional and Inclusive Tours Charter airline in Berlin during the last years of the Cold War.)

this vital matter of air access can get. The double-daily Emirates A380 flights are an example of excess – even unfair – competition. There is however a right level, no-one would condone monopoly for a national carrier, nor could it work in practice. What is needed is for a government objective to be set on the share of the Mauritius market required for the national carrier – at least 50% would be a good starting point.

CAN ALL the above be achieved under the levels of decision-making granted to a civil aviation Department? For the whole spectrum of matters that have been under consideration here, the answer has to be "No". What is needed is a Civil Aviation AUTHORITY – known to be under consideration just now – having decision competences similar to those held for example by the UK CAA, which sits, as it were in judgement, on all air operator issues including AOCs, route licences, recommending landing rights and even fare levels. In the rebirth of aviation post-COVID, the establishing of a Mauritius CAA would give impetus and cohesion to the potential of Aviation/Aerospace to develop together as a new and welcome 'growth pole' or pillar of our island economy.

As former UN climate chief Christiana Figueres said recently of the world's recovery from the pandemic: "We have an unprecedented opportunity to press the reset button..." and to show that "...we are entirely capable of making decisions to Build Back Better."