

2.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins of St. Helier of the Minister for Economic Development regarding the nature of an incident involving a Flybe airliner on 23rd February 2010:

Will the Minister inform Members of the nature of the incident involving a Flybe EMB-190 series airliner being ferried from Jersey to Exeter on 23rd February 2010 and advise whether any action was undertaken by Jersey Airport; if so, when and what lessons, if any, have been learned from this incident?

Senator P.F. Routier (Assistant Minister for Economic Development - rapporteur):

Firstly, I should point out that some of the information contained within the submitted question was factually incorrect, but I am pleased to be able to clarify the incident which did take place on 23rd February 2010. During a routine runway surface inspection pieces of debris were found on the runway and adjoining grass areas. The debris was soon identified as engine cowling from a Flybe Embraer-195 aircraft which had recently left Jersey and was being ferried to Birmingham, after being declared serviceable by Flybe, because it was needed for another flight which was to leave from Birmingham. There were no passengers on board. The debris was located before the aircraft landed at Birmingham and the air crew were duly informed. The runway was immediately closed while the debris was removed and subsequently swept. The Air Accident Investigation Branch was informed immediately and the incident is now the subject of an investigation by them. I would not like to speculate on such an investigation until the full results and any subsequent recommendations are known. In the meantime, a full investigation was carried out by Jersey Airport in accordance with our safety management system, which found that all procedures in place were correctly carried out. This has been confirmed by the Air Accident Investigation Branch who have stated that no further action is required of Jersey Airport at this time.

2.1.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

The Assistant Minister has been reported on media that he did not feel that the incident warranted any media report. As Concorde was brought down by a piece of metal approximately 1 inch by 8 inches on a runway, whereas the cowlings on the Embraer are 7 foot in height and also there were supposed to be somewhere upwards of 50 fragments on the runway, does the Assistant Minister not think that the incident warranted, in the public interest, even a statement saying that the incident had taken place and that the Air Accident Investigation Board and the Director of Civil Aviation were investigating it and a report would be published, which is the norm elsewhere?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I think it is rather unfortunate that the Deputy does try to bring some sort of comment about the Concorde accident because I have spoken with the Air Accident investigator and he said absolutely no comparison at all can be gained from trying to compare them. In fact, I have an email which states that: "There can be no comparison with the Concorde accident which was both extremely unusual and the only fatal accident known to have been caused by debris. Concorde was vulnerable to such an accident because of its design which is not replicated on any aircraft that we see in Jersey. Furthermore, the cowling was of composite fibre and while likely to have caused some damage had an aircraft hit it, probably would have just broken up on impact." The investigator was one of the Concorde investigation team and he is the one who is

carrying out the investigation on this particular incident. With regard to the comments that we should have made it public; it has not been normal procedure. It is not normal procedure at other airports to make an announcement like that. The amount of debris that we do collect on the runway is a regular thing. It happens on a regular basis and it was not felt appropriate or needed to be a statement to be made.

[9:45]

2.1.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Would the Assistant Minister tell us what time of day this was?

Senator P.F. Routier:

There are a lot of timelines being brought together at the current time ready to go to the Air Investigation people. It happened about 6.30 p.m. in the evening the plane left Jersey, and landed at Birmingham at about 7.30 pm.

2.1.3 Deputy D.J. De Sousa of St. Helier:

Can the Minister inform the House when, after the incident, his department or himself became aware of the incident?

Senator P.F. Routier:

The department were aware of it as soon as the normal checking of the runway took place. They became aware of it ... this is the trouble with timelines. I do not want to give out information which is contrary to what is being given to the ... I have not got the full list in front of me. There is a timeline been put together ready to go to the investigation. I am not sure whether it is appropriate to be giving out times, but certainly they became aware of it before the plane landed in Birmingham, that is for sure. I first became aware of it - because it was not something that was needed to be reported to me - when I received the question from Deputy Higgins.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Can I say we have got numbers of questions to get through and not all Members are going to be able to ask their questions today. I have seen a number of lights flashing in relation to this matter, but we must move on. I am going to allow 2 more questions. The Deputy of St. Peter:

2.1.4 Deputy C.H. Egré of St. Peter:

Would the Assistant Minister accept the fact that the airport itself operated exactly as one would have expected but having said that, in hindsight, would he now make sure that in future if any incidents result in reporting to the A.A.I.B. (Air Accident Investigation Branch) it would be good policy to inform the media that that has occurred?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I thank the Deputy for highlighting the fact that the airport did carry out their duties efficiently and effectively. Perhaps once we have the results of the investigation and the recommendations from that, I will certainly ask the Accident Investigation people whether they think it is appropriate but I certainly take the point and this is a very, very rare occasion and if that is a desire, certainly I will consider that.

2.1.5 Connétable P.F. Hanning of St. Saviour:

Could the Assistant Minister let us know how many aircraft either took off or landed before this debris was discovered? If there were not any then I really do not see that there is a problem, but perhaps he could comment.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Yes there were 3 planes that took off and 4 that landed during that period before the debris was removed. Certainly that was the case, but they landed safely and took off safely.

2.1.6 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Does the Assistant Minister, despite what he said about the Concorde incident... which I accept Concorde was a unique experience in terms of the design of the airplane and the fact that debris from the burst of the tyre went up through the fuel tank and the fuel spewed back where the afterburners were causing it to ignite; so that was a special case. But aircraft have been damaged by the ingestion of parts or debris on runways through engines, which have caused engine failure on take-off. So it is not correct to say that accidents are not caused by this. Does he not feel that it is of concern to the public because the aircraft that did depart immediately after that included a baby flight and also another airliner flight? So there were at least 2 or 3 airliner movements immediately after that incident occurred.

Senator P.F. Routier:

Certainly, these questions obviously have highlighted some concerns and they are being investigated. I just do urge Members to be cautious and to wait for the outcome of the investigation. I really should say that I want to reassure Members and the general public that the correct procedures were followed and Jersey Airport had and still have safety systems which are appropriate and especially in the particular regime of inspection of the runway. The minimum requirement is to have 2 inspections a day; we have, on average, 8 or 9 inspections a day. I am sure that the airline company themselves who caused the debris to land on the airfield will make a comment when the investigation is complete, as will Jersey Airport.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Can we bring this to a close please?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I would like to thank and congratulate the staff who found and removed the debris in an efficient and timely manner.