



# **DUBLIN – THE GATEWAY TO IRELAND**

**Submission by**

**Dublin Chamber of Commerce**

**To**

**Tourism Policy Review Group**

**Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism**

**March 2003**

## **Statement of Priority Demands**

### Dublin's role

- Recognition of Dublin's role as a focal point and gateway for Irish tourism
- Build on growing trend for short break holidays and urban tourism.

### Priority Investments

- Development of a national conference centre
- The construction of an additional high-quality all-seater stadium of at least 40,000 capacity
- The construction of a rail link connecting Dublin city centre to the airport

### Measures to Improve Access

- Improved access to Dublin Airport in the short term through the speeding up of the roll-out of the Quality Bus Network and the commencement of additional dedicated "airport flyer" bus services
- The development of additional runway facilities that will allow the airport cater for the projected increase in passenger numbers
- New terminal facilities should be developed at Dublin Airport, in particular the temporary and permanent Pier D facilities.
- All North American routes that were suspended in the past 18 months should be restored and new routes that are economically viable (San Jose / Silicon Valley) opened up.
- Incentives for the development of new routes should be increased

### Strategic Marketing Issues

- Development of the higher-yield tourism market should be prioritised and supported by a joint industry-state strategy
- The development of a series of new festivals, events or days to help spread tourist levels more evenly throughout the year.

# **1 BACKGROUND AND APPROACH**

## **1.1 The importance of tourism**

Dublin Chamber of Commerce represents the interests of business in Dublin across all sectors.

The Chamber recognises the importance of the tourism industry as a driver in the development of employment, foreign revenue earnings and national economic growth.

In particular, the importance of Dublin as the new gateway for tourism to Ireland is recognised. It is the flagship city in a new pantheon of leading European city destinations, as well as being the principal entry point for the greatest proportion of overseas visitors to Ireland.

Accordingly, Dublin Chamber of Commerce has continued to emphasise the necessity of enhancing Dublin's attractiveness as both a tourism location in its own right as well as the first stop in a broader Irish tourism itinerary.

## **1.2 Why Dublin ?**

Previous strategic reviews of Irish tourism have focused on the conundrum of seasonality – how to extend the traditional tourist season from a twelve week, largely rural experience into a year round industry.

More recent trends in the international tourism industry show a growing shift towards short break holidays, and an increasing emphasis on urban tourism. This latter phenomenon is characterised by a focus on international cities, including historic and cultural destinations as well as "fun cities".

Dublin is well positioned to capitalise on this trend. It has many positive attributes including:

- Status as a European capital
- Strong literary and cultural tradition
- Attractive buildings and places of historic interest
- Growing reputation as a "fun city"
- Leading international business city, offering opportunity to combine business and tourism visits
- Good international air and sea connections with low cost access
- Centre of transport hub to rest of Ireland

These attributes can be harnessed to further develop Dublin and Ireland's tourism industry.

## **2 Recommendations**

### **2.1 Major Events**

While Dublin's tourism industry has had sustained and incremental growth over the past ten years, there is still opportunity to attract large numbers of additional visitors for once-off events. These include international sports events, concerts and international conferences. So that Dublin can compete in this growing market, it will be necessary to complete both a National Conference Centre and a second major sports stadium.

These have long been recognised as key strategic goals – yet the failure to deliver these projects speaks little of the commitment of successive governments to making the required investment in tourism infrastructure. Conversely, other projects such as the Guinness Storehouse (private) and the newly opened National Aquatics Centre (public) as examples of what can be achieved where there is focus and a deadline.

The Government must now firmly commit to the completion of the Conference Centre and the sports stadium – both of which form part of the current Programme for Government.

#### A National Conference Centre

The estimated benefits to Dublin of the construction of a 2-3,000 seater conference centre (according to the Indecon report) are that it would gain an additional 30,000 visitors and €50 million in tourism revenue each year. There would also be substantial repeat tourism, arising from conference attendees' positive "Irish experience".

There are roughly 4,000 conferences in Europe each year. Dublin gets some smaller ones, approximately 40 a year (1% of total), but few of the larger ones. This compares to annual figures of 180 large conferences for Vienna and 105 of them for Copenhagen.

The proposed model for a Conference Centre in a city of Dublin's size is one capable of accommodating 2,000 - 3,000 conference guests seated, with supportive exhibition and breakout space, in a venue close to the city's main hotel, retail and other facilities and accessible via high-quality transport links.

International experience shows that with a suitable level of marketing and sales activity, a large-scale conference centre can be operationally viable and will not require on-going funding from the State.

#### A Second Stadium

Dublin has considerable potential to position itself as an attractive location for international sporting events – with considerable spin-offs for tourism.

Studies by Dublin Chamber of Commerce have demonstrated the high value added benefits which international sports events and concerts bring to the economy. These include large numbers of out of state visitors, high levels of spending across a variety of areas, very positive "Dublin experiences" and strong levels of repeat tourism.

Ireland has already demonstrated its potential to host major sporting events and the planned Ryder Cup and the Special Olympics will add to that reputation. A key requisite for the development of this market sector will be the availability of stadium facilities.

While Croke Park is a magnificent stadium of the highest international quality, a number of factors inhibit its use for a broader array of events. Apart from organisational politics, the issue of seasonality and clash of dates for premium sports events in busy sporting calendars as well as planning restrictions on usage will limit its availability as Ireland's major sporting venue.

A second high-quality all-seater stadium of at least 40,000 capacity is required as a priority.

Preferably, this should be in a location close to the city centre, close to entertainment and other facilities and well served by public transport.

#### Creation of New Festivals

It has been shown that Dublin's tourism industry has the capacity to host additional events through the shoulder and off-peak seasons.

The re-invigoration of the St Patrick's Day Festival is an excellent example of how a traditional event can be repositioned as both a fun and cultural experience for the local market as well as a showpiece for the international tourism market.

There is opportunity to build on this success through the creation and development of new innovative festivals, events or special days. A high quality and attractive Autumn festival or event in Dublin would provide an ideal balance with the traditional St Patrick's Festival in the Spring and generate additional numbers of overseas visitors.

## **2.2 Transport**

### Public Transport

While there has been some improvement in recent years in both the service levels and quality of public transport services operating to the airport, tourism surveys carried out by the Chamber have consistently shown that visitors to Dublin are unhappy with the standard of public transport in the Greater Dublin Area.

As a means to providing visitors with an attractive level of mobility during their stay, the implementation of the world-class fully-integrated multi-modal public transport system as set out in the DTO's Platform for Change must be speeded up.

Dublin Airport is one of the only major airports in Europe that has no city centre rail connection. The construction of such a link connecting Dublin city centre to the airport must be prioritised.

In the short term, the following set of short-term measures to improve public transport access to Dublin Airport needs to be urgently implemented:

- The speeding up of the roll-out of the Quality Bus Network
- The commencement of additional dedicated "airport flyer" bus services
- The construction of a single multi-modal public transport interchange adjacent to the airport
- The improvement of facilities for buses and taxis including expanded kerbside facilities.
- The development of interchange facilities for people changing between public transport modes at several city centre locations, major suburban town centers and several interchanges with existing rail services

Delivery of these measures should be overseen by an effective implementing body that has discretionary budgetary powers, such as the proposed Greater Dublin Area Authority

#### Dublin Airport

Dublin Airport is Ireland's national gateway and passenger numbers – 15 million last year – are expected to reach 27 million by 2015. If Dublin Airport is to continue to successfully carry out this function, terminal facilities, airside and runway extensions at Dublin Airport will be required.

The Chamber welcomes the expansion work on the terminal facilities at Dublin Airport that was finished last year, allowing it to cater for twenty million passengers per annum.

Additional runway facilities should be developed that will allow the airport cater for the projected increase in passenger numbers. Also, runway facilities at the airport should be developed to cater for large aircraft such as the Airbus A380 and fully laden Boeing 747Fs.

A decision on the development of an independent terminal should be reached at the earliest possible stage. This issue should not be allowed to delay the much-needed development of extra terminal facilities at Dublin Airport, in particular the temporary and permanent Pier D facilities.

#### New Air Services

Dublin's attractiveness as a tourism destination is heavily dependent on a range of frequent direct flights to major international airports. It is vital for the future health of the sector that the reductions in the level of services on North American routes that was a result of the economic slowdown and the 9/11 terrorist attacks are reversed. Similarly, the routes that were suspended need to be restored and new routes that are economically viable (San Jose / Silicon Valley) opened up. To this end, incentives for the development of new routes should be increased.

The creation of new routes from North America to Ireland (Toronto, Philadelphia) and the restoration of previously suspended routes (Baltimore / Washington) are

welcome. These demonstrate that there are viable markets from the USA to Dublin year-round and to Shannon in the peak summer season. Nonetheless, the continuation of the Shannon stopover is a hindrance to the development of year round flights from new and existing North American destinations.

Following the judgement by the European Court of Justice in 2001, the ending of the requirement that half of the flights on US-Ireland routes stop at Shannon Airport is imminent. The appropriate course of action is to prepare immediately for this change and to allocate a new marketing budget to develop new tourism products for the Shannon region.

### Cycle lanes

Given that cycling is such a popular way for visitors to explore Dublin, there is merit in the development of the existing fragmented cycle network to create a safe and extensive network similar to those in other capitals such as Amsterdam. In particular, the proposed Dublin Bay cycle ring route from Sutton to Sandycove would add greatly to Dublin's attractiveness as a "cycling city".

## **2.3 Developing Higher-Yield Tourism**

While Ireland has benefited from mass-market lower spending tourism over the last decade, there are clear advantages in now developing further the market for higher-end tourist.

Considerable progress has been made in the provision of the facilities that this market segment demands. For example, after investment from many of the higher-end international hotel chains, Dublin has a large stock of quality international four and five-star hotels.

What is now required is the development of an agreed strategy to grow this part of the industry. When developing higher-end high-yield tourism products, it will be vital to recognize the role of private sector employers at both multi-national and SME level in identifying and exploiting overseas markets

## **2.4 Institutional Issues**

In addition to Tourism Ireland, the Irish Tourism Industry Confederation and Dublin Tourism, there are many other groups who allocate substantial budgets in the marketing and promotion of the industry. As a result, there is considerable overlap and duplication, with blurred lines of communication and a fragmented approach, leading to a lack of focus and return.

A more co-ordinated approach between relevant bodies will be essential to further improvement of Dublin's tourist product and performance. The main bodies in this respect are the Local Authorities, Tourism Ireland, the OPW, Dublin Chamber of Commerce and the tourism industry itself.