



Introduction

The Dublin Chamber of Commerce welcomes the opportunity to input into the preparation of the Department's Strategy Statement 2011-2013. Our comments build upon our submission into the Tourism Renewal Group in 2009 and our 2006 paper '*Tourism ABC: Promoting Dublin as a location for Arts, Business and Culture*'.

The tourism sector is an essential component of the Dublin economy, and contributes in a unique and dynamic way to the city's cultural mix and vibrancy. Recognising the importance of this industry for Ireland, Dublin Chamber believes more concerted action by Government is required to regenerate the Dublin tourism "product" to ensure value for money and attract higher value-added visitors to the city.

Dublin Airport

Dublin Airport is central to the continued development of the economic, business and tourism life of the Dublin City Region and the wider economy as a whole. Competition for international investment and employment occurs mainly between city regions. Dublin is the only city region of sufficient size and scale in Ireland to be able to successfully compete internationally. It is therefore important that Dublin is supported in its role as the engine of national growth and has airport infrastructure available that supports the long run requirements of businesses, tourists and international knowledge workers.

Dublin Chamber supports the complete investment programme outlined by the Dublin Airport Authority (DAA) to improve the passenger experience and service level at Dublin Airport, including a second runway capable of serving long distance markets such as Asia and the Far East and additional car parking facilities for passengers. In the immediate term, this capital investment programme is positively impacting on employment and helping to restore confidence – international, business and consumer. In the longer term, it will help to underpin the Dublin City Region's competitive position.

Recommendations:

- On balance, Dublin Chamber takes the view that the Dublin Airport Authority's investment programme is critical to the future development of the region and requires the funding to deliver it. At all times the level of airport charges at Dublin Airport should seek to be competitive (below) when compared with those of airports of similar capacity in Europe.
- Dublin Chamber was extremely disappointed at the introduction of an airport tax in 2008 and believes it should be removed. At the very least, we believe that the airport tax should be brought in line with airport charges in competitor airports of similar capacity in Europe and that the revenue from the tax should be ring fenced for infrastructural development in the areas surrounding the airport.
- Dublin Chamber is opposed to differential pricing between the two terminals at Dublin Airport, as Terminal 2 is specified to offer the same standard of service and quality as Terminal 1. In addition, we believe that the development of Terminal 2 should complement the developments at Terminal 1, as it is the airport infrastructure as a whole that is a critical element in attracting and retaining FDI in Ireland.

Catering to all tourists

Immediate steps are required to develop the city's tourism offering which maximises upon its unique history and culture. Dublin must become a welcoming location where standards of service are personable and professional, and where the entire city's cultural offerings are fully accessible to tourists, including those on a short weekend break. In particular, barriers to the promotion of Dublin as a family friendly destination must be eliminated.

Recommendations:

- Many of the cultural centres in Dublin remain closed on Mondays, in the evenings and are limited to a few short opening hours on a Sunday. This is an outdated tradition that no longer caters to the need of tourists and should be re-examined. Changes must be made to opening times to facilitate Monday opening, late opening mid-week, and earlier opening at weekends.
- Licensing laws should be reviewed to ensure that Dublin is not losing the important family segment of the tourism market. Many bars now serve competitively priced food, yet tourist families cannot avail of these prices as they are prevented from eating in such establishments after 9pm if any of their party is under the age of 18 years.
- The Dublin Bus Tour route should be reviewed to take account of the major attractions and recently redeveloped areas of the city including the grand canal area, the Aviva Stadium, and the Croke Park Stadium which is home to the GAA Museum which celebrates the history and heritage of gaelic games and its unique role in the national movement and cultural revival in Ireland.

Marketing and Promotion

Continued investment in tourism infrastructure and marketing is required.

Recommendations:

- Dublin Tourism should appoint a 'Cultural Ambassador' for the city, who's remit includes the provision of a comprehensive listing of events and a proactive marketing of a series of thematic programmes in the city.
- The Chamber believes that there is a need to fund an advertising campaign that focuses upon the many existing cultural attractions in the city. There is an untapped opportunity in the city for cultural attractions to be given a theme and "packaged". The promotional campaign must also tackle the belief that Dublin is too expensive.

Product Development

In our 2006 paper, we identified the lack of non-hotel public venues suitable to host a dinner reception for large audience numbers (in excess of 300 persons) as a blockage to developing Dublin's business tourism sector. We called for creative discussion and co-operation between local and national Government, state agencies, third level institutions and the business community to identify possible high status venues – existing and new. We are disappointed that, with the exception of the banqueting space that will come available when the Conference Centre opens in 2010, this infrastructure gap has not been addressed.

Furthermore Dublin needs a "Major Events" strategy to clarify and improve its offering in this area. Australia provides a useful case study. It has made major sporting and cultural events a key component of their tourism strategy through the use of the Melbourne Cup, Commonwealth Games, and Sydney Olympics etc. At present in Ireland, major events are run on an ad-hoc basis, largely through the efforts of a small number of individuals, associations and local authorities.

Recommendations:

- The OPW should proactively identify, and open, new venues that can facilitate the needs of the business tourism sector.

- The Health and Safety Authority should work with industry and the Dublin local authorities to maximise the capacity of all non-hotel venues.
- Fáilte Ireland should establish a Major Events Forum, gathering together senior experienced people from both public and private sector to provide their input, and use this forum to put together a strategy through to 2025. A small group of individuals who are part of the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism or Fáilte Ireland, working in partnership with other public sector bodies, the national governing bodies, volunteer groups and private organizations, should implement the approved strategy.

Infrastructure and Transport

Government should continue to support the development of public transport in Dublin. When delivered, the LUAS BXD, Metro North and DART Underground projects will considerably enhance the tourist experience and provide the backbone of an integrated transport service. Improvements to the quality and efficiency of the bus service are being made that will also provide visitors with real time passenger information and an integrated ticket between bus and rail.

Recommendations:

- The programme for public transport development in Dublin must be maintained.
- Government must support the development and enhancement of Dublin and Ireland's air and sea port access to ensure the customer experience and service is world-class.
- The de-regulation of the taxi industry has resulted in a much-needed increase in taxi provision on the streets of Dublin. However, the Taxi regulator must introduce legislation that ensures a high minimum standard of cleanliness, hygiene and service in each taxi.
- Tourism locations and hotels in the city centre need safe pick up and drop off points for passengers travelling by coach. Furthermore, parking facilities for coaches in the capital need to be improved. Local authorities must be encouraged to work with tourism providers and the hospitality sector to ensure traffic plans and parking arrangements satisfy the needs of all concerned.

Innovation

Dublin Chamber supports the vision set out in Fáilte Ireland's tourism product development strategy for continuous product innovation to improve communications with visitors. In particular, we believe there are opportunities to enhance communications using technology such as PDAs and mobile phones to facilitate activities such as tourism itinerary planning and mapping. We believe that Government should support and encourage a cooperative approach between tourism bodies and private enterprises to implement the strategy and the capital infrastructure it may require.

General Environment

The attractiveness and cleanliness of Dublin's civic space is a critical element in the tourist experience. Government must support local authorities in the region in ensuring that Dublin is clean and that it is promoted as such. Dublin Chamber is actively working with Dublin City Council to this end. In addition, businesses in the city, through BIDS, are working to ensure Dublin city centre is a welcoming urban environment.

Recommendations:

- Street Vending: Street vending and persons standing with advertisement boards need to be regulated. These often cause obstructions on the pavement and inconvenience tourists walking from location to location.
- Begging legislation & crime: Government must introduce effective legislation on begging to ensure that visitors are, and feel, safe. Government should explore the use of Community Courts to deal effectively with low level crime.

Conclusion

The city of Dublin is renowned worldwide for its energetic pulse and important heritage. However, as travel becomes more widely accessible and affordable, and tourists become more sophisticated, Dublin's tourism offering must evolve, Government must support continued investment in public transport, the training and development of persons in the hospitality sector, in technology that will improve our tourism product and in ensuring Dublin is litter and crime free. Tourism is an important source of economic activity and employment. Therefore it is important that actions are taken to ensure that the city becomes a safe, clean, accessible and welcoming tourist destination.