

JCAA Wants More Open Skies Agreements

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Acting Director General of the Jamaica Civil Aviation Authority (JCAA), Colonel Oscar Derby, highlighting the benefits of Jamaica moving to fully liberalised air service agreements, at a JIS Think Tank on Tuesday (November 24).

Acting Director General of the Jamaica Civil Aviation Authority (JCAA), Colonel Oscar Derby, has said that securing more open skies agreements could reap tremendous benefits for the Jamaican economy.

"One of the most popular trends in the global industry is to move to open skies. Many countries are using Open Skies agreements to allow greater traffic rights to their airlines, so that businesses can flourish in the air transport world", he told a recent Jamaica Information Service (JIS) Think Tank session.

Colonel Derby explained that prior to open skies agreements, bilateral air service agreements operated mainly to the benefit of the major provider, and offered very little economic gain to partnering states. However, he noted, increased open skies partnerships have allowed for greater competition, and have forced airlines to become more efficient, in order to survive on routes.

"A consumer interest type of more liberal agreement allows more liberal traffic rights, and allows market forces to drive the aviation industry. Traffic on routes where such agreements now exist tends to increase and airfares tend to decrease," he explained.

While Jamaica has forged agreements with countries such as Brazil, Chile, the UK, Mexico, Spain and the United States, among other countries, Colonel Derby expressed his belief that more can be achieved.

Currently, approximately 90 % of Jamaica's agreements are said to be with the United States. Liberalised agreements with other member states would allow the opportunity to expand to routes outside of just traditional US corridors.

"Were Jamaica to move to a liberalised format of air service agreement, we would seek to have these with many states, as they are really highways between Jamaica and those states," he stated.

"The airlines of the countries that are party to these agreements will be able to use these highways, and the more air commerce that comes in to Jamaica is the more our economy should benefit," he stated.

Colonel Derby also highlighted the benefits of open skies agreements to passengers and the island's airports, noting that this will result in cheaper air fares and present a greater possibility that Jamaica's airports will remain viable.

"We are now using some 57% of our total airport passenger throughput capacity. With more airlines coming to Jamaica by way of these agreements, the airports will be able to get up to 100% capacity and will be able to continue their development to increase capacity," Colonel Derby stated.

The Acting JCAA Head expressed the hope that pending Cabinet's approval, Jamaica will move to adopting a totally liberalised format for air service agreements in time for June 2010, when the country will host the third annual ICAO Air Service Agreement Negotiations Conference. ICAO members will converge to seal air service deals and lobby for support of their bid for a council seat.

At the first meeting, in Dubai in 2008, 27 states were represented and approximately 100 persons were in attendance. At the 2009 conference in Istanbul, 200 persons represented 49 states. The Jamaican contingent to Istanbul held informal talks with a number of states and hopes to cement these talks into agreements at the 2010 meeting.

On Monday December 7, The JCAA will join the rest of the world in observing International Civil Aviation Day, under the theme, "65 Years of Empowering Global Community through Aviation".

The activities will commence at the Kingston Parish Church on Sunday, December 6 and will conclude on Monday, December 7, with an International Civil Aviation Day seminar at the Hilton Kingston Hotel, New Kingston.