

Teesside Airshow Traffic Management Investigation Report

Introduction

This report has been prepared by Phil Forster, Managing Director of Teesside International Airport (TIA) following major traffic issues experienced by people attempting to get to the Teesside Airshow on Saturday 11th June 2022. The report outlines the process of planning for the airshow, the problems experienced on the day, the key findings about the reasons, and the lessons learned for any similar TIA events.

Background

The SkyLive Air Teesside Airshow was initially due to be held in June 2020 at Teesside International Airport. The event was postponed due to coronavirus restrictions imposed in March 2020.

TIA entered into a licence agreement with SkyLive Air Limited for the Airshow. The Licence Agreement provided that SkyLive Air was responsible for the staging and management of the airshow on the airport's site. That agreement included an Event Management Plan (EMP) prepared by/for SkyLive Air, to set out the details of how the aviation and non-aviation aspects of the day would be managed, and this incorporated a Traffic Management Plan (TMP), which set out how the traffic would be managed to make sure people could get into the site, park safely and then leave the site at the end of the event.

The EMP also had to take into account the fact that a number of commercial passenger flights would be leaving the airport during the day, so passengers would be coming to the airport to fly and not to watch the airshow, and inbound passengers would need to be able to leave the airport as planned.

Preparation for the Airshow

SkyLive Air had previously delivered two airshows at the airport, one in 2016 and one in 2017, both of which attracted thousands of people.

Following the Covid 19 pandemic, with people wanting to attend big events again, and with the 2022 airshow being the only planned event of its kind for 120 miles, around 20,000 to 25,000 people were expected to attend, with the airport having capacity for 7,500 vehicles.

On 28th February 2022, SkyLive Air appointed Hatton Traffic Management Ltd as their traffic management contractor for the event. Hatton is an experienced traffic management consultancy – for instance they have advised on traffic management at events such as the Great North Run, as well as previous Teesside airshows.

A meeting was subsequently held on 9th March 2022 with a range of stakeholders and partners, who formally constituted a Public Event Safety Advisory Group (PESAG). This was made up of representatives from:-

- Darlington Borough Council (Chair)
- County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service
- Durham Police
- NHS England
- R5 Air Displays
- SkyLive Air
- Stockton Borough Council
- West Yorkshire Counter Terrorism Authority
- Teesside Airport

The EMP and TMP and other documents were submitted to PESAG for its meeting on 9th March and reflected those submitted for 2016's event.

Situation at the Event

On Saturday, 11 June the Teesside Airshow opened its gates to traffic at 8am, ahead of the show beginning at 12 noon. Media posts ahead of the event had suggested that event attendees should travel early to avoid being held up in accessing the event site. As ticketholders in cars attempted to enter the event, from relatively early in the morning they and other road users experienced major traffic issues on nearby routes, including the A67. At one point, Durham Police closed the A67 to allow traffic to flow from the A66 Long Newton Road, which would have caused significant delays on the A67. As a result of this traffic congestion, a number of people were unable to attend the airshow and small number of passengers missed their flights out of Teesside Airport.

Scope of this Investigation

As part of this investigation: –

- I have met with PESAG, the airport's management team, the event organisers (SkyLive Air) and the Tees Valley Mayor;
- I have also met with passengers who missed their outbound flights that day because of the event;
- I have also reviewed information provided by our communications team, in relation to social media feedback and comments reported in the local media; and
- I have reviewed all event planning documentation that has been made available; however, for some meetings, it should be noted that no minutes or decisions logs were produced.

It is not within the scope of this report to address any issues relating to refunds from the event organiser – I am however aware that SkyLive Air has publicly confirmed that anyone who could not attend because of the transport issues will be able to apply to SkyLive for a refund of their ticket price in due course.

Key Findings

Communications

- Only one full meeting of the PESAG was held, on 9th March 2022, 3 months before the event was due to be held. Despite the traffic management company being appointed on 28th February 2022, it was not invited nor aware of the PESAG

meeting on 9th March 2022. At the 9th March PESAG meeting, various actions were identified and taken away by the parties. Various separate meetings were then held outside of the PESAG meeting (including a specific meeting on traffic management), by various parties, without clear communication on discussions or actions going back to PESAG for a further centralised review.

- A separate “tabletop exercise” was organised for 23rd May, with representatives from TIA, County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service, Durham Police and Stockton and Darlington Borough Councils, North East Ambulance Service, Cleveland Civil Contingencies Unit, the RAF, TIA and SkyLive Air invited to attend to rehearse event scenarios. The results of the exercise may have been fed into the management of the event but no formal feedback from the exercise was recorded.
- It is understood that the traffic management company was aware (and raised at the separate traffic meeting referred to above) that, given the number of vehicle bookings for the airshow, it could take up to four hours to process all the vehicles and bring them onto the site for parking, if everyone arrived within a relatively short window of time. Neither TIA nor other key parties were made aware of this information, and there was no record of them being informed.

Organisation and Management

- The airshow flight schedule attracted some of the most well-known air display teams in the country, including the Red Arrows, making it clear this would be a high-profile, popular and heavily attended event.
- It was agreed in the airport’s Licence Agreement with SkyLive Air that the EMP for the event would be submitted to the PESAG; and various documents were then prepared ahead of the airshow, including a comprehensive overarching EMP (prepared by SkyLive as the event organiser), and a TMP, which were provided to PESAG ahead of its meeting on 9th March.
- The TMP was very high level and should have taken more note of the fact that access to the airport is effectively through one key road junction on the road network. More thought could also have been given to public transport to the event.
- As mentioned above, during the planning process, one meeting of the PESAG took place three months before the event. The minutes of that PESAG meeting detail various actions, questions and issues relating to subjects such as event security, health and safety and the location of the control centre for the event. However, the minutes of the meeting record that “the group agreed that a further meeting would not be required ahead of the event”, making it clear that any actions were to be taken away and dealt with separately in different meetings. With the benefit of hindsight, it would have been helpful to hold a subsequent PESAG meeting to track actions, or failing that clear lines of responsibility and accountability to close off outstanding actions and report back centrally should have been detailed, to check whether any further co-ordinated planning was necessary.
- On the morning of the airshow, there were no arrangements in place for the police to be at the event, despite over 20,000 people planning to attend the event. Only

- once the traffic had significantly built up to the point of serious disruption to the local area were the police brought in, and they had to call in officers from home to assist.
- While PESAG included representatives from Durham Police, it did not include members from Cleveland Police. Although Durham Police has jurisdiction over the Darlington roads in the immediate vicinity of the airport, many ticketholders would have come from other parts of the Tees Valley, and joined up working between the forces could have benefitted the planning process and capacity issues experienced by Durham Police on the day.
 - The traffic management contractor had just five staff working at the event despite being aware in advance that, if most people arrived at the site within a short window of time, it would take four hours to process the vehicles and get them on-site. Anecdotal feedback suggests the traffic management staff in attendance were reactive, rather than proactive in terms of managing the vehicles, seemed unprepared for the traffic volumes, and there seems little doubt that more traffic management staff on site and on the airport approaches would have improved the efficiency of the traffic flow. There were also accounts from members of the public that some members of the transport management staff sat in their vehicles rather than actively trying to manage the traffic, even where problems were clearly significant. Despite a TMP being produced in advance and taken to the PESAG for comment, the execution and resourcing of the traffic management provided was inadequate on the day.
 - It was also understood by the event organisers that over 2,500 cars turned up on the day of the event without a pre-booked car parking pass (the requirement for which had been stressed in the event marketing), adding to the delays with getting cars which had been properly booked in advance onto the site

Ownership and Leadership

- All parties involved in the planning for, and management of the airshow had a responsibility for the safe and efficient running of the show, and as highlighted in this report, there were various failings in this regard.
- The traffic management plan was not detailed enough, and meetings on event planning and implementation were infrequent and disparate.
- Key meetings do not always seem to have been attended at a senior level, with documentation of discussions and actions being recorded, assigned, followed-up and reported back, nor was there a clear lead to manage or track this process.

Conclusion and Lessons Learned

Overall, as set out above it is clear that there were a number of shortcomings in the planning for and management of the traffic aspects of the event, which contributed to the issues on the day. It was incredibly disappointing that the airshow, which was a good event that attracted excellent flight displays and entertained those that were able to attend, was overshadowed by these serious traffic issues.

The main lessons learned for any future TIA regional impact events are set out below.

(a) As set out above there are lessons to be learned about the constitution, attendance, and management of this PESAG which will be relevant for similar groups put together to

review event management planning (and specifically traffic management) at future regional events. Specifically, we would highlight: –

- Making sure that the PESAG is attended by suitably senior staff;
- Having a series of group meetings, to ensure that any issues that arise are assessed and come back to the group to be reviewed;
- Ensuring that there are clear action lists and responsibilities, which are allocated, followed up, reported back and re-assessed;
- Ensuring that the Police are involved in event planning, with thought being given early to whether other neighbouring police force(s) should also be included, because of the potential wider traffic impacts;
- Considering whether there could be a wider regional arrangement to make sure that advisory groups for one-off events can and do learn lessons from previous successful events.

(b) TIA is very unlikely to host another airshow on its site in the future, without significant reassurance and comfort from key public sector stakeholders and any future event manager that all issues raised within this report would be addressed. TIA's plans to increase passenger numbers and make the airport more sustainable in the long term are key to its future. We cannot host any further events outside our core activities which could negatively impact on our service to our customers. Increased flights and passenger numbers will lead to more vehicles coming to and from the airport (although not in such concentrations as those attending the airshow), and we will continue to work with all relevant parties, informed in part by the lessons learnt here, to ensure that disruption of this kind does not happen again at the airport.

Phil Forster
Managing Director
Teesside International Airport Limited
Dated 27th June 2022

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Minutes of the PESAG Meeting

(<https://www.teessideinternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Appendix-1-%E2%80%93-Minutes-of-the-PESAG-Meeting.pdf>)

Appendix 2a – Airshow Event Management and Safety Plan (EMP)

(<https://www.teessideinternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Appendix-2a-%E2%80%93-Airshow-Event-Management-and-Safety-Plan-EMP.pdf>)

Appendix 2b – Notes to accompany Teesside Airshow EMP 3rd draft

(<https://www.teessideinternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Appendix-2b-%E2%80%93-Notes-to-accompany-Teesside-Airshow-EMP-3rd-draft-.pdf>)

Appendix 3 – Site Plan (<https://www.teessideinternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Appendix-3-Site-Plan.jpeg>)

Appendix 4 – Traffic Management Plan (<https://www.teessideinternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Appendix-4-%E2%80%93-Traffic-Management-Plan.pdf>)