



# Brussels

## Growing for the Future

**Luigi Vallero** assesses Brussels Airport's ongoing investments and its medium-term plans to meet both passenger and market expectations.

▼ Airliners from several European carriers stand at Concourse A. Brussels is the home of the European Parliament and consequently has excellent connections with the rest of the continent from its largest airport. (All photos author)

Brussels Airport (BRU) continues to invest to keep its infrastructure up-to-date and provide the best possible experience for its passengers. The airport recorded a 9.3% year-on-year increase in travellers during 2011 and a further rise of 1% was achieved in 2012, bringing the total to 19.2m. Transit passenger numbers continue to increase, totalling 3.2m - or 16.5% - in 2012, double the proportion ten years ago. While this is still below the figures achieved in the days of Belgian flag carrier SABENA, it is a clear indication of the BRU's appeal as a transfer point for STAR Alliance partners.

### Attracting traffic

Traffic development has included a healthy overall increase in the higher yield origin and destination (O&D) sector and BRU has demonstrated a comparable or larger O&D market than its peer European airports, tapping into its local catchment area and neighbouring countries. Airport management estimates indicate 1.2m passengers originated in the Netherlands, France, Germany and Luxembourg.

After a dip in January and February 2013, passenger numbers once again increased, although overall figures were down slightly due to the resizing of Jet Airways' operations. The Indian carrier had been using BRU as its east-west 'scissor hub' since the mid-2000s (see *Airports of the World*, issue 33, p36), flying a mix of Airbus A330s and Boeing 777s on a daily basis from Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai. The jets arrive at roughly the same time and continuing westwards to New York/JFK and Newark in the USA and Toronto in Canada - Brussels providing an effective interchange point. The system was substantially reduced in 2012 as Jet Airways shifted towards the Skyteam Alliance (having requested permission from the Indian Government to join it) and the carrier is reportedly planning to move its hub operation to Amsterdam/Schiphol. Its Brussels-New York/JFK and Chennai-Brussels flights were both suspended during 2012 and Brussels Airlines has since started its own service to New York/JFK.

BRU nevertheless remains popular with airlines and has continued to increase its number of routes. For the summer ➤





◀ Bus stands at the western end of Concourse A. These will disappear in 2015 when the concourse is extended west to add 20 more gates.

▼ Brussels Airlines' transfer passengers will benefit once the extension to Concourse A opens as, thanks to the extra gates, connecting flights can be grouped closer together.



▼ The view from the main terminal across to Concourse A. Groundwork has begun prior to construction of 'The Connector' building to span the gap, replacing the tunnel currently used.

2013 timetable the network covered 200-plus destinations worldwide served by 66 airlines, including a mix of low-cost and full service carriers.

**Recent developments**

The airport's three runways enable up to 74 movements per hour - with a potential to reach 80 - while the centralised terminal between the parallel 07L/25R and 07R/25L runways optimises taxi times. One of the most modern in Europe, it features a 'single terminal' concept with two bright and airy piers: Concourse A (previously known as Pier A) for EU and Brussels Airlines' Africa flights; and Concourse B (previously Pier B) for all non-Schengen flights. There are 55 contact gates, 22 bus gates and 54 remote aircraft stands, giving BRU a capacity of around 28mppa - so there is plenty of growth potential.

Concourse A is effectively a 'midfield terminal', linked to the main building and Concourse B by a long underground tunnel. The main check-in area was added to in 2010 when a section dedicated to charter tour operators was opened.

A tunnel connecting the airport's underground railway station to the new Schaarbeek-Mechelen line (to provide direct rail access from Antwerp) was completed in 2012, meaning travellers no longer have to travel via Brussels Central Station.

**New projects**

In 2011, the airport's management launched a €460m medium-term '2016 Vision Plan'. Partially funded by a small increase in airport charges, it covers further upgrades to the existing infrastructure aimed mainly at improving comfort and convenience for passengers by reducing walking distances, or the need to use escalators and lifts, while also making the security screening process easier.

New features include:

**Concourse A West**

From 2015, Concourse A will be extended westwards, adding 20 more contact gates and reducing the use of remote stands and associated bus transfers. The extension will mean carriers, notably Brussels Airlines and the other Star Alliance members, can better concentrate hub activities within the same zone, reducing walking distances for transfer passengers.

**The Connector**

The link tunnel between the main terminal and Concourse A is used by more than ten million passengers a year and, despite being praised as one of the most efficient structures of its kind, is often perceived as a nuisance for passengers, requiring them to use escalators, lifts and a long underground travelator. Replacing the tunnel, a new link building known as 'The Connector' will enable rapid and easy transit while affording views of aircraft and the airport. This light and spacious 656ft-long (200m) structure will include retail areas and extra room for security controls, so passengers can be screened more quickly and comfortably through 30 screening lanes and ten access control units. Designed by Chapman Taylor-Buro Happold-MOSS the €70m facility is scheduled to open by 2015.

▲ Saudia Cargo Boeing 747-48EF/SCD TF-AMU (c/n 27603). Plans for major improvements to the Brucargo area include adding more warehouses.

**Other activities**

Under the 2016 Vision Plan, the Brussels Airport Company proposes integrating the development of LCC activities within the existing airport infrastructure. Dedicated boarding gates, easily reachable by following coloured lanes, are already in service and used by easyJet. In the medium-term there is no requirement



for a dedicated LCC terminal - but use of the original terminal, redundant since the demise of SABENA, is a possibility should market conditions require it in the longer term.

A sleek set of eight-storey administrative buildings - which date back to 1957 when the airport hosted the Brussels World Expo - are being redeveloped as part of the 'Gateway Business Centre' concept, a sustainable working environment for 1,600 workers which will include a business centre right at the heart of the airport.

Opposite the passenger terminal, Brucargo, one of the largest air freight facilities in Europe, currently supports 6,000 jobs. There are plans to add further buildings at Brucargo West, following on from the 322,928sq ft (30,000m<sup>2</sup>) Brucargo West 1 building which opened in 2009. Improvements are also being made to infrastructure and equipment to facilitate smooth handling of the 747-8F and improve transits between warehouses and aircraft.

Confirming the importance of investing in Brussels, express package company DHL opened a new €27m logistics centre at Brucargo West in March 2013, covering 581,270sq ft (54,000m<sup>2</sup>) and providing 247,578sq ft (23,000m<sup>2</sup>) of warehouse space.

Although BRU is relatively close to the major competing hubs of Amsterdam/Schiphol and Paris/Charles de Gaulle, its airline marketing team, led by Léon Verhallen, has done well over the past five years to secure new routes and airlines, despite difficult global trading conditions. The airport's management has supported them by investing in the necessary infrastructure to meet passengers' and airlines' needs.

Brussels is home to the European Parliament, so good connectivity is essential. The city's main airport clearly has the right business model to provide it, and can be assured of a prosperous future. ☑

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A check-in area for charter and tour operators, opened in 2010, affords ample space for holidaymakers laden with luggage.

