



Royal and ministerial air travel project - frequently asked questions

Why do Ministers and the Royal Household need to use dedicated aircraft or charter air services?

The large majority of Royal and Ministerial air travel is undertaken by scheduled flights. However, a significant number of journeys require the use of special, non-scheduled air travel, particularly when more than one visit or meeting is planned on the same day but not in the same place. In these situations minimising the amount of travel time is critical so that all commitments can be honoured and meetings do not have to be cut short. Air travel is often the most practicable solution in these circumstances.

What did Gershon recommend?

Sir Peter Gershon recommended the provision of a new service, based around two dedicated fixed wing aircraft: one to carry 15 people and the other to carry 70 people. In addition, he recommended that the planes should be able to travel at least 4,000 miles before needing to be re-fuelled.

What is the Department recommending?

The Department's analysis confirms Sir Peter Gershon's assessment of the position in 2006, but no longer supports the purchase of two large dedicated aircraft. Instead, we are recommending the procurement of a small aircraft for official travel within the UK, chartered air services for longer journeys involving small parties and a continuation of existing arrangements with UK airlines for journeys involving large parties.

Why do the Department's recommendations differ from Gershon's?

Our conclusions differ because there have been significant changes to the pattern of Ministerial use of air travel, and to the supply of commercial aircraft, since Gershon published his report in 2006.

What are the environmental benefits of the new service?

The new air travel arrangements will produce an estimated 10% saving on CO2 emissions resulting from using 'right sized' chartered aircraft rather than a specific one size dedicated aircraft. The use of more modern charter aircraft replacing flights formerly provided by 32 (The Royal) Squadron's BAe 146 aircraft will reduce CO2 by 40% per passenger-mile.

How can you demonstrate that the charter market now provides value for money given Sir Peter Gershon's previous concerns?

As Sir Peter Gershon identified in his report, buying or leasing an aircraft would still provide the best guarantee of availability. However, the costs of owning an aircraft are now likely to be substantially higher, and the amount of expected use substantially lower, than at the time of Sir Peter's report. In addition, the users of the existing service are now making increasing use of the charter market, and a number of concerns expressed during 2006 have now been addressed.

Who will buy the small aircraft?

The small aircraft will be procured and managed by the Royal Household.

When will the Royal Household buy the aircraft?

It will be a matter for the Royal Household to determine the timing of any procurement.

What will be the role of the RAF in the future?

It is anticipated that the service provided by 32 (The Royal) Squadron will be withdrawn by 1 April 2009.

Does this mean that the service currently provided by the RAF is deficient?

No, that is not the case. The priority for the 32 (The Royal) squadron, which currently provides the service, is to support military operations and provide training for aircrew. Only after these requirements are met does the RAF provide air travel for the Royal Household and Ministers out of spare capacity.

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