

Star alliance plans major customer investment at london–heathrow airport

London, March 30, 2001 Star Alliance", the airline network for Earth, is discussing significant investment at London's Heathrow airport to give customers the true benefits of network competition.

Speaking today at a press briefing held in conjunction with a meeting of the Star Alliance Chief Executive Board in London, the Chairman of bmi british midland, Sir Michael Bishop, indicated that more than £50 million would be required to develop the transfer services which would allow passengers to get the full benefit from Star Alliance at the world's busiest international airport.

Heathrow is an important global hub for Star Alliance. It is also here that we face some of our toughest competition. Oneworld has developed a strong alliance network, with members that we all respect as strong carriers. Our members are committed to ensuring that Star Alliance becomes the premier alliance offering from Heathrow. The investment we are planning will only accelerate the process of bringing real network competition choices to people traveling from and through the UK, Sir Michael said.

Today, the bulk of Star Alliance airlines are grouped in Heathrow's Terminal 1 and Terminal 3. The ideal solution would be to combine all Star Alliance flights together in one terminal. Acknowledging the fact that terminal facilities remain tightly constrained at Heathrow, Sir Michael said Star Alliance may not be able to achieve this goal as quickly as desired.

However, we can significantly improve the connection times and facilities for our passengers, he continued. The Chief Executive Board of Star Alliance will this week be taking decisions on a series of short-, medium- and long-term initiatives, ranging from the introduction of connection customer service teams and timetable scheduling to airport infrastructure developments. We plan to work closely with the airport authorities to unlock the potential of Heathrow as a Star Alliance hub.

At the media briefing in London, the Chairman of bmi british midland confirmed that his airline's entry into Star Alliance has been successful. Interline traffic from the other members has surged since bmi british midland joined the partnership in July of last year – the growth was up 60 per cent, year on year, in the last six months of 2000. In fact, a major part of the increase came from All Nippon Airways: by being able to market an integrated offering to customers in Japan, bmi british midland saw a massive growth in traffic routing through Heathrow from Japan to a wide range of European destinations.

Sir Michael also announced a new transatlantic cooperation agreement between bmi british midland and Star Alliance partner United Airlines. When bmi british midland launches long-haul scheduled services from Manchester to Chicago and Washington, D.C., this summer using Airbus A330-200s in a 3-class configuration, it will be in full cooperation with the U.S. carrier. In addition to the direct connections, customers will be able to fly from Manchester to a choice of 22 final U.S. destinations through a code-share arrangement with United.

During the past few months, a dedicated Star Alliance organization has been set up by recruiting a top team of professionals from the member airlines as well as from other industries. Said William Meaney, who succeeded Friedel Roedig as the Chief Executive Officer of the alliance two months ago, "Even though small in numbers we are a truly global team combining skills and cultures from around the world. It is a perfect platform for driving global solutions that will create even more customer benefits and additional value for our owners."

The many projects we are driving together with specialists of the member airlines vary from the ongoing harmonization of frequent flyer programs and simplifying booking processes to the long-term target of moving our operations together at all the major airports of the world, he added.

Star Alliance is also taking a leadership role among airline alliances in the development of mobile technology. At the London meeting, downloadable electronic timetables for PC s and Personal Digital Assistants were rolled out. The timetables cover the more than 9,000 daily flights operated by the Star Alliance members and are updated automatically. A flight information and notification service that works across the alliance is scheduled to be launched later this year.