

# CASE STUDY:

## THE GLASGOW AIRPORT ATTACK FROM A BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT POINT OF VIEW

**Abstract:** Glasgow Airport is owned and operated by BAA Ltd. Handling over 8.8 million passengers a year; it is the busiest of the three BAA-owned Scottish Airports. Glasgow is situated in the west of Scotland with the airport some 7 miles to the west of the city centre near to the town of Paisley.

On 30 June 2007, the second busiest day of the year due to the school holidays commencing the previous day, Glasgow Airport became the target for a car bomb attack, which propelled the airport into the glare of the world's media and created severe business continuity issues for the airport.

In line with BAA group requirements, Glasgow Airport has a fully functioning business continuity management (BCM) strategy. This came into its own during the incident and this case study details the attack and its repercussions, overviews the response and highlights the lessons learned.



**Author:** Gillies Crichton, ABCI, is currently head of compliance at BAA Glasgow Airport which incorporates safety, environment, business continuity, risk management and emergency planning. He previously spent 17 years within the BAA Airport Rescue and Firefighting Service in Scotland with seven years as the Senior Airport Fire Officer at Glasgow Airport and nine years within the Retained Fire Service in Lothian and Borders Fire and Rescue Service. He has a great deal of experience in setting up and running crisis management and business recovery teams.

## The incident

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At 15:11 hours on Saturday 30 June 2007, a Jeep Cherokee 4x4 vehicle gained unauthorised access to the inner forecourt of Glasgow Airport. The vehicle manoeuvred in an attempt a run directly at door two of the main terminal building and to gain entry into the main check-in area of the terminal building. Flames were seen issuing from the vehicle and onto the front of the building and the canopy above the doors.

The terminal fire alarm was activated and an evacuation of the building took place. This was, in the main, a calm and controlled evacuation, initially of the zone in which the call point was activated. As smoke permeated through the building, various smoke detectors activated and additional areas of the building were evacuated. The well managed evacuation of an extremely busy terminal was testament to well trained staff and robust evacuation plans which are regularly tested.

As the incident unfolded, eyewitnesses stated that two males exited from the car, with the driver on fire.

The individuals were wrestled to the ground by police officers, assisted by members of the public and airport staff who were in the vicinity. Both suspects were arrested at the scene.

Many members of the public, who were in the area, caught the scene on video, camera and camera phones. The pictures of the immediate aftermath of the incident were quickly beamed around the world.

## The response

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The initial attack on the fire was made by Strathclyde Fire and Rescue using hose lines. On the arrival of the BAA Airport Rescue & Firefighting (ARFF) unit, a high output foam monitor was utilised and the fire brought under control very quickly.

The fires were under control within 15 minutes and all fires were extinguished within 30 minutes of the initial explosion. After this, cooling of the entire area continued.

At the height of the initial response, there were 25 pumping appliances under the command of the Chief Fire officer, plus specialist appliances from Strathclyde Fire and Rescue and three major foam tenders, one light foam tender and command vehicles from the ARFF unit.

The airport's integrated emergency plans include a support mechanism whereby off duty persons are called in to support the front line staff. This is in the form of a crisis management team who look after the tactical command and a business recovery team who look after the strategic command on behalf of the airport. The crisis team was initiated and operational within 45 minutes with a business recovery team operational an hour later.

## Business recovery team

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The business recovery team initially established the critical success factors. These were broken down into short, medium and long term.

No single business recovery plan exists for this type of incident as the entire incident was complex with a large number of stakeholders involved. The main business continuity plans were utilised for short term loss of the terminal building and loss of road infrastructure. The latter was of particular use as traffic was initially banned from the forecourt area of the airport.

In order to get a limited operation up and running, it was important to build on our well-established relationship with Strathclyde Police. The whole terminal forecourt area was clearly being treated as a crime scene which restricted movement in and around the area and, therefore, stopped the business recovery team getting access to the building.

Through consultation and flexible working, the police were able to concentrate on the incident area which gave us access to the terminal building, in the first instance through the adjoining multi storey car park, and then through the ground floor doors. On getting initial access, we were able to utilise T2 (a separate overflow check-in area). This meant we were able to work ahead of the police to be operationally ready when the area was handed over.

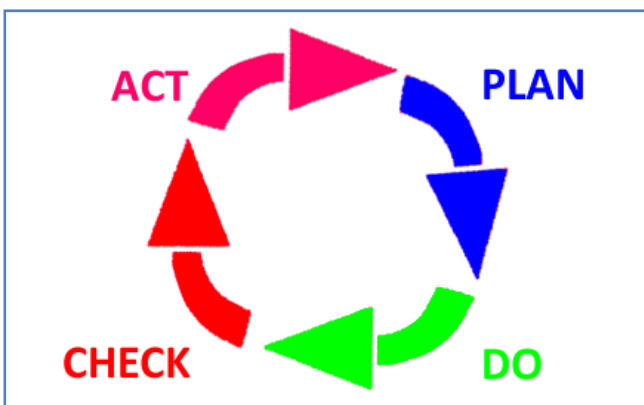
## Strategy

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Our BCM strategy served us well on the day of the incident.

We currently have a Performance Standard provided at a BAA Group level which states what is required for each business unit to ensure compliance. This non-prescriptive standard, allows us to put in place workable policies, procedures and solutions at a local level which is reflective of the particular business unit's needs.

In general, our *Managing Responsibly System* follows the well tried and tested model:



Our strategy, however, is based around what I call the 'Seven R's':

- Risk
- Resilience
- Rehearse
- Response
- Recovery
- Review
- Reputation.

## Media relations

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As this was a high profile event being covered by media from around the world, it was important to ensure that the media were handled appropriately. Our media relations team handled over 800 calls in the first 24 hours of the incident. Constant live TV feeds were being broadcast worldwide from the airport until Tuesday 3 July.

The main objectives of our PR team were to protect our image and avoid any undue criticism of BAA Ltd. Recent disruption at Heathrow has shown how we need to carefully manage the messages we extend to the community.

Our managing director led from the front and spent a great deal of time briefing our main stakeholders but also took the time to thank our staff for their continuing efforts.

The business as usual message was spread through many avenues including:

- MPs/ MSPs
- BAA website
- Glasgow city centre 'big screens'
- E bulletins
- Four week ad campaign on local radio.

The BAA website received over 560,000 visits in the 14 days following the event; this was 60 percent more than the entire month of June. The week following the incident, Glasgow Airport website received 130,000 visits compared to 6,000 the previous week.

## The challenges

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At the height of this incident, there were approximately 1,100 passengers held on board aircraft for several hours. This was necessary to allow the police time to implement plans to evacuate all travellers to the Scottish Exhibition & Conference Centre (SECC) in Glasgow where each person was interviewed prior to being released to home/hotel for the night. In total, around 4,500 passengers were evacuated to the SECC.

During the fire situation, two sprinkler heads activated within the ground floor of the terminal building. Due to the proximity of the isolation valve which was within the crime scene area, the sprinkler heads could not be isolated, which resulted in a great deal of water pouring into the building over several hours until the area was declared safe.

The initial cleanup of the main terminal commenced on Sunday morning. This included cleaning up several thousand litres of water which had come from the sprinkler system. Smoke damage was light in areas away from the immediate fire damaged area.

Our main emergency plans are around aircraft related incidents involving a single airline. This event involved all airlines using our airport. It was therefore vital to co-ordinate and communicate the reopening of the airport with our airline partners and onward transmission of this information through to our passengers. This was done through regular meetings with the Airline Operating Committee which has representatives of all our airlines and handling agents. Good communications with stakeholders is an essential part, as some airlines were not prepared for such an early resumption of operations and had cancelled flights.

The first flight arrived at 07:37 on Sunday 1 July, a mere 16 hours 26 minutes after the initial fire.

## Positives

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The excellent working relationship with the police and other emergency services cannot be understated. By establishing direct contact through the Tactical Command Centre, we were able to discuss business recovery issues and what the police could do to assist in speeding up the process of recovery whilst still concentrating on the core objective of evidence gathering. Conversely, we ensured that resources were available to do what we could to assist the police e. g. commissioning a structural engineer to advise on the stability of the building. The crime scene was handed back to us in 54 hours (a recent murder scene in Glasgow took four weeks).

Our maintenance team was on hand to assist the police in provision of services, manpower and resources as required e.g. the erection of screened-off fencing around the inner cordon to keep the area sterile. Our maintenance team had procurement cards and were empowered to utilise these for business recovery purposes e.g. procurement of 200 litre drums from a local DIY store.

We were very grateful to the staff volunteers who went above and beyond the call of duty, working long hours and remaining cheery and helpful to our passengers. The volunteers were used to direct passengers through our alternative solutions to car parks, check-in area and terminal; to inform of cancelled flights etc. In the main, passengers were very good natured and appreciated the efforts being made by the airport and emergency services to get the business back up and running.

It is important to remember that an incident such as this is likely to be protracted and therefore, reliefs are required. A robust roster needs to be put in place at an early stage. We have a list of staff

volunteers in place with home contact details. This list shows staff in the strategic, tactical and operational role categories.

The drive for business as usual continued and following some road layout changes, the outer forecourt area was brought back into place on Wednesday 4 July for use by taxis and coaches.

Half of the affected entrance door was brought back into service on Friday 6 July, in time for the next busy weekend period. Both halves of the doors were fully operational on 27 July, less than four weeks after the event.

As part of our commitment to the safety and welfare of our staff, we had trained counsellors on site from Sunday through to Tuesday. We opened up this facility to our other business partners, which was warmly received.

Through rapid implementation of our business recovery plans, great teamwork, drive, commitment, hard work and dedicated staff, and working closely with the emergency services, the main terminal building reopened in a phenomenal 23 hours 59 minutes after the incident started.



*Photographs show door two in the aftermath of the attack on 30 June 2007 and on 27 July 2007.*

## Summary

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This was a high profile event for Glasgow Airport in particular and the aviation industry in the UK in general. It was made even more challenging as it happened during our busiest period of the year.

Through having robust plans in place, we were able to deal effectively with the incident and return the airport to normality in a staggeringly short period of time.

The pictures and images of this incident beamed around the world bear testament to the potential catastrophic situation which could have developed but for the bravery of the initial responders.

I cannot over-emphasise the benefits of robust, workable plans with a team dedicated to dealing with the crisis and a separate team dedicated to restoring normality as quickly as possible. These plans are only effective if they are tested regularly and all members of the responding teams fully participate in these tests.

Our airport suffered what could have been a catastrophic event, was it just good luck? I think not. From identification of our risks through to the mitigation of the risks, the plans in place and, most importantly, well trained and competent staff, we were able to demonstrate that business continuity management is an essential part of our ongoing lives... the unthinkable can and does happen!

## REVIEWERS' COMMENTS

As a factual summary of the Glasgow incident, I found the paper sparked my curiosity and interest, because I could relate the story to what may happen here in our South African airports. It raises the question as to how prepared are our own airport management teams particularly in the light of the upcoming 2010 soccer World Cup. Extensive work is being or should be done at all the major airports in a drive to ensure that the influx of soccer fans can be dealt with efficiently and safely.

The paper is understandably brief, but touches on most aspects of business continuity, as well as the crisis management elements. Communication and crisis management was particularly well handled, because the incident crossed the world's news bulletins with ease and did not elicit a 'panic' response from the public. The effective crisis management actions almost turned this into a non-event.

What would also be of interest is a more detailed discussion or explanation of the business continuity work carried out before the incident. The state and general background to the business continuity and crisis management plans such as testing frequency, origination and drafting process would also be enlightening to the reader.

The timeline of events and responses discussed in the paper could also be described or even sketched in more detail to highlight the activities which took place and when they took place.

The author explored beyond the immediate impacts, and touched on the wider effects of the incident, particularly the effect of delaying passengers and flights. Also there may have been effects and indirect consequences not noted at the time, and not even in Glasgow. It could be possible explore this further with some theoretical scenarios and 'what if...' discussion.

*Brian Henry, FBCI.*