

COLONY AND PROTECTORATE OF KENYA.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL.

EMBAKASI AIRPORT.

In paragraph 120 of the Report of the Planning Committee which was submitted to the Legislative Council in August 1951 it is stated that the Committee had come to the conclusion that some funds should be set aside for a new main airport. It was generally agreed that Eastleigh was not a desirable site from many points of view. Not only was it difficult to extend the runway sufficiently but the approaches were unsatisfactory. The necessity for safeguarding the funnels of approach retarded the development of the industrial area and was likely to involve the payment of considerable sums in compensation. In addition a large area of valuable land, urgently required for building and other purposes, was sterilized. On the assumption that the Government would not have to meet the whole cost of a new airport and taking into account the value of the land which would be released ultimately at Eastleigh, the Planning Committee recommended that a sum of £250,000 be earmarked as a contribution to the cost of constructing an airport at Embakasi.

2. The Government had already commissioned the Nairobi branch of Sir Alexander Gibb and Partners, a firm of Consulting Engineers with wide experience of aerodrome construction, to prepare a preliminary project report on a new airport at Embakasi. This report was published in April 1952 with a Government statement in which the financial implications were explained. The Government considered that the proper course was to refer the preliminary project report to the Planning Committee with a request that the Committee consider the proposal to build a new airport at Embakasi in the light of the financial position of the Colony. The recommendations of the Planning Committee would be submitted in due course to the Legislative Council with the views of the Government thereon.

3. The initial cost of constructing an airport at Embakasi to the standard recommended by the Consulting Engineers is estimated at £1,900,000, including land and a road of access from the Athi River road, but exclusive of Royal Air Force installations. The Director of Public Works has, however, recommended a

number of economies and, as a result of discussions with the Ministry of Civil Aviation on a technical level, the initial estimated cost has been reduced to £1,510,000. This will provide a single macadam runway, 10,000 ft. x 150 ft. with 25 ft. shoulders to agreed specifications; compacted overruns of 600 ft. to the N.E. and 200 ft. to the S.W. and additional cleared areas of 1,400 ft. to the N.E. and 800 ft. to the S.W.; necessary tarmac aprons and taxiways; and civil operational and terminal buildings. No hangars are considered necessary for so long as East African Airways continue to operate from Nairobi West aerodrome.

4. According to latest technical advices, the airport would be capable of taking any modern aircraft now in service or under design, and it could be enlarged at any time without reconstruction. The site, which is entirely free from navigational obstructions, offers almost unlimited scope for future expansion should this ever become necessary. It is anticipated that the Ministry of Civil Aviation would contribute £250,000 towards the initial cost.

5. In April 1952 some 33,000 acres of land in the vicinity of the proposed aerodrome were frozen under section 6 of the Indian Land Acquisition Act. It was not then known whether the orientation of the runway recommended by the consultants would be accepted and it was necessary to freeze a much larger area than was likely to be required ultimately. The orientation of the runway has since been agreed and, in view of the many complaints received from landowners in the district that prolonged enforcement of the freezing order was unfair and a deterrent to development, it was decided early this year to appoint a Collector to acquire the land actually needed for the siting of the aerodrome. This land covers an area of a little over 4,000 acres and a Supplementary Estimate for £90,000 is being submitted to the Legislative Council this session to cover the estimated cost. If construction of the airport is proceeded with, it will be necessary to declare other land in the approaches a "declared area" under the Aerodrome (Control of Obstructions) Ordinance.

6. The Planning Sub-Committee of the Executive Council, which has replaced the original Planning Committee, has examined the project and also the alternative of endeavouring to extend the runway at Eastleigh to meet the needs of jet and turbo-jet aircraft. Apart from the other disabilities of this aerodrome, any extension of the runway would entail the acquisition of further land at the City end, and the cost of bituminising the whole runway to the extended length of

9,280 ft. is estimated to be of the order of £500,000 and there would then be, as now, no overrun. Any further extension would necessitate bridging the Nairobi River at a minimum estimated cost of over £300,000. The aerodrome could, moreover, never provide a second parallel runway which might conceivably be needed to meet increased traffic density in the future. In addition, it would be necessary to close Eastleigh to air traffic for a minimum period of three to four months during reconstruction. The Executive Council accepted the report of its Subcommittee and recommended that construction of an airport at Embakasi should be undertaken with the minimum of delay.

7. It is understood that the Hermes aircraft now used by B.O.A.C. on their East African services are likely to be replaced in the not far distant future by Britannia turbo-jets with double the carrying capacity, and it has been stated by B.O.A.C. that a minimum runway of 10,000 ft. would be required. The prohibitive cost of improving Eastleigh rules out any temporary expedient and it is therefore desirable to embark on the Embakasi project as soon as possible. It is estimated that an airport at Embakasi would take from three to four years to complete but some saving in time and cost might be achieved by the immediate utilization of prison labour on preliminary clearing, quarrying and removal of black cotton soil. A single project of this nature and magnitude is ideal from the security angle and the Director of Public Works estimates that up to two thousand effectives could be usefully employed at Embakasi.

8. The replacement of Eastleigh by Embakasi would lead to the eventual release for development purposes of valuable Crown land. It is thought that, even if Eastleigh is closed as an aerodrome, the Air Ministry will wish to retain the R.A.F. technical and domestic buildings there. The value of the land on which these are sited does not fall far short of the value placed on the Air Ministry's present holdings and the matter is under negotiation.

9. Believing therefore that it is essential that Kenya should have an airport capable of dealing with modern aircraft and which can be expanded to meet future developments, the Government proposes that the construction of Embakasi Airport be proceeded with as soon as possible.