BBGA LOOKS TO DISPEL BIZAV'S 'CHAMPAGNE' IMAGE

News / Business aviation

Business aviation in the UK faces two significant issues: dispelling the image of business aviation as a luxury for the rich and privileged rather than a business tool, and addressing such challenges as access to airports and taxation. That was the message from the annual conference of the British Business and General Aviation Association (BBGA), held recently in London.

"People have a negative perception of the industry, one we're working hard to change," said Marwan Khalek,BBGA chairman (and group CEO of GAMA Aviation), in his opening remarks. Brian Humphries, president of the European Business Aviation Association (EBAA), expressed a similar sentiment. "We see our sector poorly portrayed and even vilified in the press," he noted. He lamented commentary made by the BBC in its Oscars coverage after Leonardo DiCaprio made his remarks about the environment. "They said, 'But he did go home in a private jet.'"

"We have to find a way of communicating [better]. We think we know what people think of us, but

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we don't. So we [EBAA] did a perception study and an update to our economic impact study." The perception study targeted a representative sample of people in Europe.

He said that 65 percent have a "good or excellent impression" and less than 4 percent hold a "poor" impression of bizav, and "most thought the image had improved over the past 10 years; 97 percent of policymakers and 90 percent of customers recognized that it is a good business tool; but 40 percent thought it represented poor environmental performance." He continued, "This was not really fair as we represent only 7 percent of the traffic and less than 1 percent of emissions."

He added some stats from the economic impact assessment: the bizav sector in Europe, EBAA research suggests, supports 371,000 jobs, €21 billion in labor compensation, €98 billion in economic output; Germany, France and the UK are the key players (accounting for approximately 25 percent, 25 percent and 10 percent of the market, respectively). In addition the sector serves more than 25,000 city pairs "that scheduled carriers don't serve. And one in four of the cities has no scheduled connection at all."

"We've got a very good story to tell; and we know that the more people that know about us, the better the impression. We need to focus the message on productivity gains," said Humphries. "And we really need to work on the environmental sustainability [message]: economic benefit versus the environmental impact."

OPPORTUNITIES IN CHINA

The UK government is "looking for high-value opportunities" in China, reported Jim Gilhooly from UK Trade &Investment (UKTI), and has tasked his company with "matching them up with UK capabilities. We have a project right now looking at the GA market in China; the next step will be for me to see if there are things [the British business and general aviation sector] can help with."

"The Chinese GA market is in its infancy but the government [there] understands it is an economic enabler… the 13th Five-Year Plan was endorsed in the past few days." He said that low-altitude airspace in China is the issue mentioned most, but "there is a need to improve everything they're doing."

Gilhooly said the Chinese civil aircraft fleet now numbers some 2,125 aircraft (around one-tenth the size of theUK fleet alone) in service with more than 300 operators, "But they are springing up all the time." There are 515 airports, he said, with "plenty of space and hangars."

"Just moving up the trend line would move the fleet up to 100,000 aircraft, everything from lighter-than-air to large bizjets." He mentioned the recent signing of an accord between China's CAAC and Europe's EASA on airspace regulation. "They recognize that they don't have the understanding or experience to turn theory into practice." He said that the Chinese also see that their infrastructure is not yet adequate to support a growing GA/bizav fleet, so–for example–it has "created a company to put fuel into remote airfields."

Gilhooly concluded by saying that UKTI had established "a strong network [of contacts] around China," and that the UKTI research would be completed by the end of last month "so they'll have a database of opportunities."

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