

Why we don't want a third runway at Heathrow

It is expected that the Government will announce its decision on a new runway in October, the rumoured date being the 19th. There seems little doubt that it will be a clear-cut decision: permission will be given for either a 3rd runway at Heathrow, Heathrow Hub or a 2nd runway at Gatwick. Although the Heathrow third runway is the favourite, it is by no means certain. Philip Hammond, the chancellor, has backed Gatwick in the past; cabinet members Justine Greening and Boris Johnson are known opponents of a 3rd runway; and Theresa May herself, whose Maidenhead constituency is under the flight paths, has been no fan of Heathrow expansion over the years. In 2009 she said:

“A third runway will result in thousands of additional flights, increased noise and more pollution for thousands of people. The Government's promises on the environmental impact of this are not worth the paper they are written on – there are no planes currently on the market that would allow them to meet their noise and carbon dioxide targets. We need a better Heathrow, not a bigger Heathrow.”

Heathrow claims that the current proposal is very different from the 2009 version in that it includes many more measures to assist residents. Sir Howard Davies, who headed up the Airports Commission, has said publically that he believes that neither Theresa May nor Philip Hammond are intractably opposed to a 3rd runway at Heathrow. (Code for don't trust politicians?) So we can probably expect either a decision for Heathrow, accompanied by weak and ineffective conditions (but possibly something on night flights which Theresa May has never liked), or a green light for a 2nd runway at Gatwick.

The decision would be debated in Parliament, but either decision is likely to get the backing of a majority of MPs in Parliament given their desire to see a new runway built. As well as local MPs, MPs, councils, chambers of trade in the regions London have been remorselessly lobbied by Heathrow who have spent a reported £17 billion on PR. They have been told ludicrous and unsubstantiated stories about economic benefits of Heathrow expansion which, sadly, many have fallen for.

The decision will be followed by a public consultation, probably on the noise and air pollution impacts of the new airport.

We encourage people to write to Prime Minister Theresa May and, importantly, to copy to their local MP and councillors and leader if the council Julian Bell. Here are some points you could make, but in your own words.

Total costs will be over £36 billion. Heathrow pays the cost of the runway (£17bn) but has said it will only contribute £1.1bn towards the costs of the road and rail infrastructure, including putting part of the M25 in a tunnel. Those costs are put at anything from £5-6bn (Airport Commission's estimate) to £18bn (Transport for London's estimate). Heathrow's Spanish owners want a gigantic subsidy from British taxpayers for their new third runway!

Heathrow aircraft noise already affects more than 725,000 people. That puts Heathrow in a noise league of its own. 28% of all people impacted by aircraft in Europe live under the Heathrow flight paths. New flights needed for a new runway could put that figure to over 1 million, bringing discomfort, particularly to children and older people whose health could be affected. (The Airports Commission under-estimated the noise impact enormously by using a Heathrow's 'optimisation' of flight path for a three-runway airport, but not optimising the two-runway case they were comparing it against.)

Pollution levels around London already are greater than most European cities. An estimated 9,500 Londoners die every year from air pollution. Promised cleaner aircraft will not solve the problem so Heathrow has had to resort to all sorts of hopeful policies, not under their control, to try and prove that air pollution will not be a problem. Heathrow has apparently offered to use the new runway to its full capacity only if air pollution problems are solved. But can anyone believe that pledge will be upheld when Heathrow are desperate to get the best return they can on their £17bn investment in the 3rd runway?

Over 700 hundred homes would have to be demolished and Heathrow is also prepared to buy up a total of nearly 4,000 which are adjacent to a new runway. But hundreds of thousands of other households directly affected will be offered get nothing.

A new runway would make it virtually impossible for the UK to meet its climate commitments. See infographic at <http://www.aef.org.uk/2015/03/16/infographic-why-airport-expansion-risks-the-uks-climate-change-commitments/>

Above, tell Theresa May that you don't believe - and neither should she - all these stories being put around by vested interests and their lobbyists about huge economic benefits from Heathrow expansion. Point out that the Airport Commission shows a net economic benefit only £1.4 to £11.8 billion (page 147 of the final report) over 60 years, which is infinitesimal in the context of 60 years GDP for whole UK. This is in complete contrast to figures of £200 billion or more banded about by lobbyists.

Some London councils are threatening to take legal action if a decision on Heathrow expansion gets the go ahead. And opposition to a new runway remains huge. A 3rd runway may simply not be deliverable.

Finally, please note that Virendra Sharma (Ealing Southall) currently supports Heathrow expansion. If you are in Ealing Acton or Ealing North you may care to ask Rupa Huq or Steve Pound respectively what their position is.

Nick Ferriday 02016-0923