

Just how much new connectivity will a third runway at Heathrow really provide?



A maximum of just new **12** new long-haul destinations will be served by **2050**

Domestic destinations served by Heathrow could fall without subsidy

Aviation's great strength is the connectivity it provides. This facilitates trade which provides for growth and increased prosperity. A key argument put forward by the backers of a third runway is that it is essential to improve connectivity to the emerging economies of the world. Yet, according to the Airports Commission, a third runway will only enable Heathrow to serve a **maximum of 12 new long-haul destinations** by 2050. Heathrow Airport talks about 40 new places being served but that figure hides the fact that only a minority of them are long-haul (ref <http://letbritainfly.com/news/heathrows-third-runway-the-business-outlook/>). A second runway at Gatwick would add 10 new long-haul destinations at a fraction of the cost to the taxpayer.

The number of domestic destinations a third runway would serve is still unclear. The Department for Transport in its National Policy Statement consultation paper suggested that permission for a third runway is made conditional on Heathrow serving six new domestic destinations (see below): “The Government expects to see expansion at Heathrow Airport driving an increase in the number of UK airports with connections specifically into the airport”.

- Heathrow says a new runway would enable it to serve a total of 14 domestic routes, up 6 from the current position. The 8 destinations currently served are Aberdeen, Belfast City, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, Leeds Bradford, Manchester and Newcastle. The new ones would be Belfast International, Durham Tees Valley, Humberside, Liverpool, Newquay, and Prestwick.
- Gatwick currently serves 6 routes: Aberdeen, Belfast International, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness and Newquay. It says with a second runway it could also serve Belfast City, Derry-Londonderry, Dundee, Leeds Bradford, Manchester and Newcastle.

The problem with both Heathrow and Gatwick’s claims is they don’t say how they will do this. The Airports Commission forecast that, even with a third runway, the number of domestic routes served by Heathrow would fall to four. The economics of the market are such that airlines using Heathrow would prioritise the more profitable international routes. The Commission didn’t believe that the number of domestic routes at Heathrow could rise unless the Government subsidised them. The Government has given no indication it intends to do that. The Commission predicted a two-runway Gatwick would serve 7 domestic routes (the competition with international slots would be less than at Heathrow).

In conclusion, the connectivity benefits of a third runway, both internationally and domestically, are in danger of being significantly overestimated.

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www.hacan.org.uk March 2017