

Consultation Special

Airports Commission consults one last time

In November the Airports Commission issued its last public consultation document before it publishes its final report in summer 2015. We say ‘document’; in fact the papers run to thousands of pages. Most of them are technical.

The Background

The Commission’s shortlist is down to three: a 2nd runway at Gatwick; a 3rd runway at Heathrow, proposed by Heathrow Airport; and a new runway built by doubling the length of the current northern runway, proposed by Heathrow Hub. Boris Island and expansion at Stansted have already been ruled out. The Commission will recommend its favoured option to the next Government, though the Government will not be obliged to go for it.

The Options

Heathrow Airport’s Third Runway

This runway will be built north, and slightly west, of the current northern runway; between the A4 and the M4. It will require the demolition of much of Harmondsworth. The flight path will be over Sipson and Harlington (in both places the airport will buy people’s homes if they want to sell), Heston, Osterley Park and Brentford. Beyond that, the flight paths are less certain as Heathrow may introduce curved approaches but Bedford Park and Hammersmith are likely to be affected. To the west of the airport, Datchet and Eton are in the line of fire. A third runway could cut the half day’s break people under the landing flight paths in West London currently enjoy. Heathrow is expected to publish more details on this, and other respite plans, in January.

Heathrow Hub’s New Runway

This runway will, in effect, be an extension westwards of the current northern runway. Homes in Poyle will need to be demolished. There will be no new runway but the traffic on the existing northern flight path will increase at least as far as Brentford. Beyond that, Heathrow Hub is talking of curved approaches.

A Summary Table (drawn up by the Airports Commission)

	Contribution to the economy *	Jobs created (by 2050)	Numbers impacted by noise 2050 **	Number of properties demolished	Number of new homes needed	Impact on air pollution
Gatwick	£42 - £127bn (over the period 2020-2080)	7,900 - 49,000	24,000 – 35,000	186	0-18,400	Unlikely to exceed EU legal limits
Heathrow	£112bn - £211bn	64,100 - 180,000	620,000 – 680,000	783 (but Heathrow willing to buy almost 4,000)	Up to 70,000	Will find EU limits challenging
Heathrow Hub	£101bn - £214bn	47,000 - 164,000	850,000 – 920,000	242	Up to 70,000	Will find EU limits challenging

Notes:

* The Commission expects the economic benefits to be reduced once it has completed its work on factoring in the cost of carbon. We are not likely to have this figure until it publishes its final report. **See final bullet point on next page.**

** At present 766,000 are impacted by noise from Heathrow. The Commission agrees with Heathrow that operational improvements, less noisy planes and respite periods will bring the numbers down, even with its 3rd runway. Heathrow Hub argues the numbers affected by its scheme will be less than the Commission argues due to its respite periods which the Commission acknowledges might happen. **Without a new runway the Commission estimates that by 2050, 583, 000 will be impacted at Heathrow and 9,500 at Gatwick.**

How to Respond

The Commission is asking for comments on whether it has assessed its 3 shortlisted schemes correctly.

- It is not expecting many individuals to respond in detail but, if you do want to do so, the document to read is <http://tinyurl.com/AC-Consultation>

You may also find HACAN's summary helpful: <http://tinyurl.com/HACAN-Summary>

- You may simply want to email the Commission to say in your own words why you oppose a third runway. Email: airports.consultation@systra.com
This short paper on HACAN's website may help: <http://hacan.org.uk/10-reasons-to-oppose-a-3rd-runway/>

Or you may simply wish to highlight some or all of these points in your response:

- We welcome any measures which cut noise - steeper descents and take-offs; respite periods; less noisy planes – but the real benefit comes when they are introduced at a two-runway airport. The number of planes overhead has become the big problem. We fear that, if flight numbers rose to over 700,000 a year, the impact would simply overwhelm the measures proposed to cut noise.
- The idea of providing as many people as possible with respite from the noise is welcome but we are concerned that the proposals mean that West London could lose some of the respite it already enjoys. It would seem inevitable that, with three runways each getting a period of respite, the half day's break from the noise many people in West London enjoy will be reduced. And it appears the Heathrow Hub proposal could double the number of flights for many on the northern flight path, with minimal respite.
- The fact the Commission is moving away from using the discredited 57 LAeq contour as the way to measure noise annoyance and is moving towards the more realistic 55Lden contour recommended by Europe is an important step forward – however, it would be even more meaningful if the noise of the planes was averaged out just during the periods they were flying over any given community or that the Commission looked at how many would be impacted at the level where the World Health Organisation has found people can start to get 'moderately' annoyed by aircraft noise: when it averages out at 50 decibels over a 16 hour day. Either of these two things would mean that the noise in places like Ealing, Teddington and Brockley was fully assessed.
- Currently the noise contours from Heathrow and London City Airport are assessed separately. The Commission should undertake work to carry out a joint assessment. That will give a truer picture of the actual noise experienced in parts of east and south-east London.
- Highlight the human implications of the number of homes that would need to be demolished, particularly by the Heathrow Airport scheme
- We urge the Commission to fully factor in the carbon costs when assigning the overall economic benefits of a new runway. The Commission is following the recommendation of the Committee on Climate, the Government's advisers, that one new runway can be built in the UK without breaching the country's targets to cut CO₂ emissions by 2050. A workable carbon trading scheme - the EU scheme where airlines can buy permits to emit higher levels of carbon – would allow for higher levels of growth than if the scheme didn't work and carbon had to be capped. A carbon-capped scheme would mean less growth and fewer economic benefits and less jobs but also fewer people impacted by noise. But the Commission expects both options would result in the economic benefits of a new runway being lower than currently predicted.

The consultation ends on 3rd February.