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Heathrow dismisses £18bn transport cost claims

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Heathrow airport has dismissed claims by the government agency in charge of London transport that more than £18bn would have to be spent on [improving travel links](#) if its third runway received the go-ahead.

Transport for London's estimate is much higher than the £5.7bn figure put forward by the Airports Commission, which last year recommended a third runway at Heathrow, and vastly more than the £2bn estimated by the airport itself.

TfL's [predictions for Heathrow](#) come just weeks before ministers are expected to make a final decision on whether or not to go ahead with the third runway. Supporters of Heathrow were quick to criticise the figures on Monday, with one group — Back Heathrow — pointing out that TfL is chaired by Boris Johnson, mayor of London, who still favours a new hub airport in the Thames estuary. "Boris-led TfL is hardly going to favour Heathrow," the group said.

John Holland-Kaye, chief executive of [Heathrow](#), dismissed the estimates as a "long list of anything that might be needed across London." TfL defended its figures, saying that it had not included any schemes that were already "funded or planned". Central to its forecasts is the projected growth in airport passenger numbers from about 200,000 daily trips to 430,000 daily trips if the third runway is in full use: an increase of 115 per cent. About 60 per cent of people using an expanded Heathrow are expected to use London's land transport network.

Without the upgrades, TfL paints a picture of delays on the surrounding road and motorway network and trains that passengers will struggle to board because of overcrowding. Its figures are for the period up to 2040 while the commission modelled to 2030.

The Airports Commission, which reported to ministers last summer, calculated £3.2bn to tunnel the M25 under the new runway, reroute and

tunnel the A4, widen the M4 between relevant junctions and reconfigure the M4/M25 junction.

TfL says this would not be enough to deal with the flood of extra passengers. The group has pencilled in £1.1bn for further main road capacity enhancement, £800m for area traffic management measures, £500m for bus corridor enhancements and £0.9m for maintenance of new roads until 2050.

The figures diverge to an even greater extent on rail improvements. TfL has used the commission's assumption that car journeys will remain at their present level — necessitating an overhaul of public transport links. Both the commission and TfL believe a new southern link to Windsor is needed at a cost of £800m.

But TfL believes this would require a bypass tunnel near Egham — at the cost of up to £1.8bn — to protect the riverside meadows at Runnymede. It has also estimated that £3.6bn would be needed to widen some of the tracks on the Great Western Main Line — from four to six — for several miles. Furthermore, it backs the creation of a link from Heathrow and the South West Main Line through a tunnel that would bore from the airport all the way to suburban Kingston. That could then link into Crossrail 2, a proposed new north-south rail line, if that project goes ahead.

Officials at TfL argue that the Airport Commission was wrong to make calculations only up to 2030 and assume that the three runways would not be full by then.

Ministers have indicated that they will finally make the decision on where to expand airport capacity in south-east England this summer. A second runway at Gatwick airport, to the south of London — which is another option — would also require upgrades to London's transport system. TfL has estimated that the expansion of Gatwick could require £10bn of spending on road and rail improvements to prevent “worsening crowding” for commuters. That is much higher than the commission's figure of £800m. One senior Whitehall civil servant described the total estimate for Heathrow as “nuts”.

But TfL stood by its figures. “It is entirely in the realms of possibility that some of the schemes would be deemed necessary at some unspecified time in the future,” it said.

“The point is they're not currently envisaged, planned or committed — but if Heathrow expansion is progressed they would absolutely need to be.”