

Airports National Policy Statement (NPS)

Government response to the Transport Select Committee

On 5th June 2018, the same day it published its Airports National Policy Statement (NPS), it released its official response to the Transport Select Committee's report on the NPS.

Parliament is expected to be asked to vote on the NPs before the end of June. If it does back it, a third runway becomes Government policy and Heathrow will start drawing up detailed plans for the new runway.

There is some evidence that MPs who support a third runway are backing away from voting for the NPS because it has been unclear on a number of key issues surrounding the plans. The purpose of this short paper is to highlight examples of this lack of clarity. It uses some examples from the Government's response to the Transport Select Committee.

Note: The paper is not a comprehensive analysis of the NPS nor of the Government's response to the Transport Select Committee. It merely provides a snapshot of the lack of clarity that is worrying a number of MPs. We haven't commented on the reasons for the lack of clarity, some of which may well be valid. And here is a danger in any snapshot that it doesn't do the documents in question justice. We hope we haven't done that.

Snapshot of lack of clarity

Transport Select Committee Recommendation 4

We recommend that the population impact estimates be updated to reflect **the air quality** impacts from the increased number of aircraft movements and surface access traffic that will result from the surface access strategy and mitigation actions developed by the scheme promoter as part of the development consent process.

Government response

As the Airports NPS sets out, it would be as part of the development consent process that the scheme promoter would need to undertake a detailed assessment of the air quality impacts of the scheme, including of emissions from road transport, and put forward an appropriate package of mitigations. No scheme would be allowed to proceed if it did not comply with air quality obligations.

Our comment: Information Committee asked for will only be provided once Heathrow has done its detailed work after the Parliamentary vote.

Recommendation 7

We recommend a written commitment of policy support for **Southern and Western Rail Access** be made by the Government in the NPS, including clarity around funding and the timeline for delivery. As part of this, we recommend the Department for Transport's updated surface access modelling be published so that the likely impact on road and rail congestion of a NWR scheme is known.

Government response

Southern Rail Access is at an early conceptual stage in its development and a route has not yet been defined. Subject to an acceptable business case and obtaining planning consent, operations should commence as soon as reasonably practicable after a new runway has opened.

Our comment: No clarity on the funding or timescales for key rail schemes.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that the **surface access costs** in the appraisal, and which support the NPS, be updated and included in the final NPS to reflect the indicative costs of those additional schemes required to deliver on the target of no more road traffic. We are concerned about the absence of detail on proposed changes to the **M25**. We recommend that the Government work with Heathrow Airport Limited to clarify the proposals and bring greater certainty to the development plans. A key part of this must be the arrangements for diversion of traffic during any works.

Government response

The Committee has rightly highlighted that changes to the M25 are one of the critical areas of the project. It is essential that any planning takes account of the risk of disruption and provides effective mitigation both during construction and when operational. While the works affecting the M25 are the most high profile, this is equally important for other roads around the airport. The Government and Highways England are currently working with Heathrow Airport Limited as it develops its plans.

We are aware that Heathrow Airport Limited has published further information on the plans for the M25 as part of its first consultation, the Heathrow Expansion Public Consultation. Further and fuller detail would be published as part of its proposed second consultation, to inform the development of its proposed application for development consent.

On scheme costs, these would only be identifiable once the applicant was clear about the committed public transport schemes that it is seeking to rely on. As the Committee knows, potential public transport scheme costs will vary depending on the development stage and therefore it would be more appropriate to publish scheme costs outside the NPS at relevant stages.

Our comment: The information requested will not be available until Heathrow has done more detailed work after the Parliamentary vote.

Recommendation 9

While we recognise the intention behind the current condition on surface access in the NPS, we conclude its drafting leaves too much scope for unintended surface access impacts from this scheme. We therefore recommend a condition be included in the NPS that ensures approval only be granted if the target for no more **airport related traffic** can be met, or that as a condition of approval, capacity be released at the airport, after construction, only when the target is met.

Government response

We have acknowledged Heathrow Airport Limited's public pledge to expand the airport without increasing landside airport-related traffic compared to today. This is a worthy aspiration which we support. However, we recognise the complexity of defining and measuring a specific target for no additional traffic, and the risk of unintended consequences if such a target were imposed. It is our expectation that the mode share targets would become requirements of a development consent order.

Our comment: The Government expects the Committee's request will be met; but no guarantees

Recommendation 10

We recommend that the Government provide a clear definition in the NPS of what constitutes a domestic route and that the Government outlines more clearly, in paragraph 3.34, how it intends to secure 15% of **new slots for domestic connections**, including the policy levers it will use to achieve this target. This should also include an explanation as to how the Government intends to deliver these slots in the immediate period after the third runway opens and how it will guarantee these slots are made available at suitable times spread across the day. The Government should also outline how it will enforce Heathrow's domestic connectivity commitments once a NWR scheme is in operation.

Government response

Up to 15% of the additional slots made available from the possible expansion of Heathrow Airport. The Government's expectations on domestic connectivity will be detailed as part of the Aviation Strategy Green Paper expected in the second half of 2018.

Our comment: 15% of slots have not been guaranteed; only up to 15%. And details of how they will be guaranteed have been put off until later this year.

Recommendation 19

We recommend that affected communities are provided with a minimum average period of **7 hours of respite a night**. The exact timing of this respite should be determined through joint working between the airport, airlines and communities.

Government response

The Government wants to strike a fair balance between the economic benefits that night flights offer and the cost they impose on communities, recognising that night noise represents the least acceptable aspect of aviation noise for communities affected. The Airports NPS sets out the Government's expectation for every community that may be affected by expansion at Heathrow. This is an expected ban of six and a half hours on scheduled night flights between 23:00 and 07:00, meaning that, as a norm, every community affected by expansion would experience six and a half hours of noise relief.

Our comment: The Government has only recommended a 6½ hour ban on scheduled flights not the 7 hours recommended by the Committee.

Recommendation 20

We recommend that the threshold for £3,000 in **compensation** for acoustic insulation for residential properties be revised to reflect the significant noise annoyance thresholds in the latest Government guidance; the £3,000 committed for noise insulation be independently tested during the DCO process to ensure that this is a sufficient sum of money to mitigate properly the increased noise nuisance cause by the scheme.... We also recommend that the £50m a year figure is increased by RPI each year so that the real terms value of this remains the same for each year of the 15 years.

Government response

The Committee's attention to noise insulation is timely. Heathrow Airport Limited's publicly committed noise insulation offer is to (a) fully insulate homes most affected by aircraft noise within the 60dB LAeq noise contour, and (b) contribute up to £3,000 towards the cost of noise insulation within the full single mode easterly and westerly 57dB LAeq (16 hr) or the full 55dB Lden noise contours of an expanded airport, whichever is bigger. The Government welcomes the Committee's suggestion that the funding available for noise insulating homes within the qualifying noise contours is not capped. The Government notes that the Airports NPS makes clear that the "Secretary of State will consider whether... the applicant ... has put mitigations in place, at least to the level committed to in Heathrow Airport's public commitments."

The Community Compensation Fund is an important component of the compensation package and the Government welcomes the Committee's recommendation that there should be no fixed limit on the amount of compensation offered to affected communities. Any scheme promoter taking forward a planning application for a new Heathrow Northwest Runway will be required by the Airports NPS to develop a Community Compensation Fund, in consultation with local communities. The Airports NPS sets out the principle that a Community Compensation Fund is required, but it does not mandate the detail. The Government has taken this approach because it believes that local communities should have an opportunity to influence the development of the fund through consultation with a scheme promoter. The Government agrees that inflation-proofing the fund is an area that might appropriately be addressed through consultation and any subsequent planning inquiry. However, the Government notes that there are many options for how a Community Compensation Fund could be taken forward, and not all options would benefit from an inflation-proofing requirement.

Comment: The Government is sympathetic with the Committee's requests but provides no guarantee they will be met.

The full Government response to the Transport Committee can be found here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/713654/government-response-to-the-transport-committee-report-on-the-revised-draft-airports-nps-web-version.pdf