

Airports Commission Consultation Explained

(There is a summary table at the end you may want to glance at first)

Remind me what the Airports Commission is?

It was set up by the Government in 2012 to look into whether the UK needed new runways and, if so, where they should be. It was asked to produce its final report in July 2015, two months after the next General Election.

What has it done so far?

At the end of last year it published its Interim Report. The report argued that there would be a need for a new runway somewhere in London and the South East by 2030. There was no justification for a new runway outside the South East because there would not be enough demand for it. In September this year it ruled out an Estuary Airport as a possible option. You can read more about the Commission's past decisions on its website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/airports-commission>

What are the options for new runways?

The Commission is looking at three options: a 2nd runway at Gatwick; a 3rd runway at Heathrow, to be built slightly north-west of the existing airport, between the A4 and the M4; and the idea of a new runway being built by doubling the length of the existing northern runway which would be extended westwards (towards Windsor). Heathrow Airport is promoting a new north-west runway; a private consortium, Heathrow Hub, is backing the extended runway.

What is the current consultation about?

This is the last public consultation before the Commission produces its final report next summer. It has assessed the claims of the promoters of each of the three options. It is asking for our views on its assessment. Has it got it right? Are there things it has missed out? The consultation ends on 3rd February. The Commission's documents run to thousands of pages! But this is the main document to read: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/374661/consultation-document-AC01-tagged.pdf

How the Commission rate each of the three options

Would all the options deal with the predicted capacity crisis by 2030?

Yes, they would. The Commission expects a new runway, at whichever location is chosen, to be ready to open in the late 2020s. It does acknowledge that the deadline is more "challenging" for the Heathrow options because of the work that would be involved. It is confident Gatwick could make it: "The delivery risks associated with the Gatwick scheme are assessed as relatively low." Although none of the new runways are likely to operating at full capacity by 2030, each of them would give London and the South East the extra capacity it might need.

How would each option benefit the economy?

They would all deliver substantial benefits.

Heathrow Third Runway: £112bn - £211bn

Heathrow Hub: £101bn - £214bn

Gatwick: £42bn - £127bn

The Commission has avoided giving precise figures as so many factors will influence the exact benefit of a new runway. Expect economists to have a field day! Expect each of the airports to use the highest figure!

How many new jobs would be created?

The Commission has produced a very wide range of estimates for each airport. For example, it says a 3rd runway at Heathrow could create anything from 47,000 – 112,000 jobs by 2050. It estimates Gatwick could create as many as 63,000 and Heathrow Hub up to 92,000. It expects a proportion of the Gatwick jobs to be filled by people in South London. Croydon, for example, is only 16 minutes by train from Gatwick. It also argues some jobs may be lost at Heathrow if a new runway is not built. Job numbers are notoriously difficult to predict. They depend on so many factors, including whether you just include new jobs at the airport or also include jobs created by businesses that have sprung up because of the new runway. An inexact science!

How much would the new runways cost?

The commission argues that each of the promoters has underestimated the cost of their proposed runways.

Gatwick:	Gatwick Airport estimated £7.4bn ;	the Commission estimates £9.3bn
Heathrow:	Heathrow Airport estimated £14.8bn ;	the Commission estimates £18.6bn
Heathrow Hub:	Heathrow Hub estimated £10.1bn ;	the Commission estimates £13.5bn

Who would pay?

The airports themselves would pay for the cost of a new runway but the taxpayer would pay the cost of associated works such as changes to the motorway network. The Commission puts the cost of the associated works to the public purse at £6.3bn for Heathrow Hub; £5.7bn for Heathrow; and £787,000 for Gatwick. The Heathrow options are high because both would involve extensive work to the surrounding motorway network, including tunnelling part of the M25.

How many homes would be demolished?

Heathrow would require **783** properties to go; Heathrow Hub, **242**; and Gatwick **186**. Many people in the immediate Heathrow area argue that more than 783 properties would need to go to make way for a third runway as demolishing only 783 would leave a lot of people unrealistically close to a new runway.

What would be the impact on noise?

	With <u>no</u> new runway		With new runway	
<u>Gatwick</u>				
Today	2030	2050	2030	2050
11,300	9,200	9,500	24,000	26,000
<u>Heathrow</u>				
Today	2030	2050	2030	2050
766,100	580,000	583,000	741,800	820,000
<u>Heathrow Hub</u>				
Today	2030	2050	2030	2050
766,100	580,000	583,000	992,400	1,035,100

Notes and Comments:

The measurement used is 55Lden, the one that is used by the European Union. It is more accurate than the method traditionally used by the UK Government but campaign groups would argue it still underestimates the number of people impacted. The Commission argues that, without a new runway, numbers affected would fall due to less noisy planes, improved operational practices and more respite periods. Groups such as HACAN argue that the Commission is being too optimistic about the impact of less noisy planes and more work needs to be done on this. All the figures are higher in 2050 than 2030. This reflects the fact the new runways will be busier by 2050.

Where will the new flight paths go?

We don't know for sure. The main reason for this is that flight paths will change at the airports even if a new runway is not built. This is because new technology is coming in which allows planes landing and taking off to be guided more precisely. This in turn allows the airlines to make more efficient use of airspace. Trials have taken place at both Heathrow and Gatwick to test the new technology. The new precision technology does allow for more respite to be given to residents by sharing the flight paths. The Commission acknowledges that the numbers impacted by noise could fall if respite periods are introduced in an effective way. We will not know the exact shape of the new flight paths before the Commission publishes its final report in summer 2015.

We do know, though, that the Heathrow Hub option will significantly increase the number of flights for many people living under the current northern flight path in both West London and Berkshire. We also know that Heathrow Airport's option of a new runway between the A4 and M4 will create a new flight path over Heston, Osterley Park, Brentford and Hammersmith to the east and Langley and Eton to the west.

What about air pollution?

Air pollution from aircraft is really just a problem relatively close to an airport. The air pollution around Heathrow is bad. However most of it comes from the traffic on the M4 and M25.

There are EU legal limits for air pollution which have to be met by 2020. At present they are exceeded in areas around Heathrow. The Commission says EU limits "are at risk of exceedance at a small number of monitoring sites in the local area" under both the schemes proposed for Heathrow. The report adds that for both schemes "there is clearly a substantial negative impact of the scheme on air quality, unless forceful mitigation measures are implemented." The Commission argues that "significant works are needed on the roads around the airport site to accommodate its expanded footprint including putting the M25 into a tunnel." It states that the management of congestion on the M25 and the M4 near Heathrow "will be a significant issue and infrastructure (including widening), demand management or a combination of both may be required."

Air pollution is less of a problem at Gatwick. The Commission says that air pollution levels will rise if a new runway is built but does not suggest they will exceed the EU legal limits. However, the Commission states it needs to do more work at both airports.

What new infrastructure would be needed?

Improvements would be needed to **the road network** around both Gatwick and Heathrow, though the Commission argues some of them would be required anyway. The big cost at Heathrow would be the need for part of the M25 to be put in a tunnel whichever Heathrow option may be chosen.

Either of the Heathrow options could require as many as 70,000 **extra homes** which the Commission believes may be 'challenging' for the local authorities.

Davies acknowledges the **flooding** concerns around Heathrow if all the new infrastructure is put in place.

The situation at Gatwick is more complex. The Commission doesn't buy the idea that the Sussex countryside will be flooded by new homes if a second runway is built at Gatwick: "[There] could be between zero and 18,400 [homes] (dependant on the scenario). This housing would typically be provided in a phased manner [10 years] and across the entire assessment area, and therefore the demands on any individual local authority are likely to be relatively small." A big reason for this is that the Commission expects a lot of the new workers will commute from existing areas and particularly from South London.

What about surface access?

The Commission is surprisingly relaxed about this. It believes that improvements to the road network and better public transport – such as Crossrail coming to Heathrow – will sort out the problem. It would be a surprise if it is not challenged on this by both the local authorities and Transport for London.

What about climate change?

The Commission spelt out its position climate change in its earlier reports. It argues that the UK can still built a new runway and stay within the Government's 2050 climate change targets. In this it is almost certainly correct. However, that is making assumption that the other industries are successful in cutting their CO2 (climate) emissions very significantly indeed. It also assumes that growth at the others airports across the UK will not be excessive. The Commission argues that a 2nd runway at Gatwick would emit less CO2 than either of the Heathrow options but it is accepted that any new runway would be a major emitter of CO2.

Summary Table

	Contribution to the economy	Jobs created (maximum)	Numbers impacted by noise (2050)	Number of properties demolished	Number of new homes needed	Impact on air pollution
Gatwick	£42bn - £127bn	63,000	26,000	186	0-18,400	Unlikely to exceed EU legal limits
Heathrow	£112bn - £211bn	112,000	820,000	783	Up to 70,000	Will find EU limits challenging
Heathrow Hub	£101bn - £214bn	92,000	1,035,100	242	Up to 70,000	Will find EU limits challenging