


Lies, Dammed Lies and Opinion Polls

Make up your own mind. Do you think the questions in the Back Heathrow survey below are loaded? It is on the basis of questions like these that Heathrow Airport has been claiming almost 50% of people in the boroughs near Heathrow support a third runway.

Have your say on Heathrow

Here is your chance to say whether you think Heathrow Airport should grow or close – just fill in these seven questions and return this form in the freepost envelope supplied.

Question 1
Heathrow is the UK's only international hub airport but the Mayor of London and the leader of Heathrow's local council, Hillingdon, propose closing Heathrow and building a new hub airport in the Thames Estuary (see below) and then using the site at Heathrow to build a new town.



Do you support the closure of Heathrow Airport?

Yes No

Question 2
At the moment Heathrow is operating at 98% capacity and airlines want to use the benefits of Heathrow being an international hub airport to provide more long haul flights to new and emerging markets. Should Heathrow:

Be allowed to grow and increase its capacity?
 Not grow, gradually declining as foreign airports expand?


Please tick one only

Question 3
Do you support another runway being built at Heathrow in order to maintain its status as an international hub airport and attract major airlines operators to continue to use it?

Yes No

Question 4
202 of the top 300 UK employers are located within a 25 mile radius of Heathrow Airport. If the airport wasn't allowed to grow and airlines moved their operation to other hub airports in Europe, do you think those companies would stay where they are or follow the airlines and relocate to Amsterdam, Paris or Frankfurt to be closer to a successful hub airport?

Stay where they are
 Move to Amsterdam, Frankfurt or Paris



Alan Smith (pictured left) founder of Mixed Freight Services employs 70 people and depends on Heathrow flourishing

“The coalition assembled outside Parliament is extraordinarily wide. It runs from eco-warriors to middle-class mothers in West London, hedge fund managers in Richmond, to pensioners and parents in Brentford.”

That was how the journalist Ian Martin (*Telegraph* 14/1/09) described the coalition which successfully saw off the proposals for a third runway last time round. Heathrow expansion had become politically undeliverable. Heathrow Airport knew it had to change that perception. And so, alongside Back Heathrow, the lobby group it funds, it sent out questionnaires, conducted surveys and commissioned opinion polls. It is these which have attracted so much criticism.

Heathrow's Top Pollster under Fire

Populus, Heathrow Airport's favourite polling company, has faced public criticism about the quality of its work. In August the Times posed serious questions about the way the company goes about its business (1). It focused on a poll Populus had carried out for UK Onshore Oil and Gas which claimed 57% of people supported fracking. Just two days later a Government survey found just 25% support for fracking.

The Times headlined the story *Public back fracking . . . depending on how you ask the question*. Polling expert Leo Barasi said Populus had come up with 'one of the most misleading poll findings I've ever

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seen'. He wrote: "short of faking results or fiddling the weights or sample (which this poll doesn't), there are two ways to get a poll to give the answers you want. You can ask a series of leading questions that get respondents thinking the way you want them to,

then ask the question you're really interested in. Or you can word the questions so respondents only see half the argument. This poll does both" (2).

Heathrow has consistently commissioned polls from Populus in an attempt to show support for a third runway is growing. In May 2014 Heathrow Airport claimed, on the basis of a Populus poll, that there was more support now for a 3rd runway than when it was proposed by the last Labour Government. The poll claimed to show 48% were in favour of a third runway while 34% opposed (3). In an uncanny parallel with the fracking results, these Populus results were flatly contradicted by referenda and surveys carried out by Hillingdon, Richmond and Hounslow local authorities which found around 72% of residents opposed a 3rd runway (4).

Ipsos MORI refuses to play ball

Heathrow Airport has generally stuck with Populus to carry out its polls but the one time recently they used Ipsos MORI, the respected company put a statement on its website correcting the way Heathrow had used its findings. The Heathrow press release gushed Ipsos Mori Poll "explodes the myth that Heathrow is politically undeliverable". It claimed the 58% of MPs backed Heathrow and 90% of those though it could be delivered (5). What it omitted to mention that only 95 MPs had been interviewed. Ipsos MORI immediately issued this statement: "The website should have made it clearer what is the base size for these particular questions as well as the base size for the survey in general, something we always do in our reports. The website has now been changed to reflect this."

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References:

1. [http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/environment/article4174476.ece ...](http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/environment/article4174476.ece...)
2. *Noise of the Crowd* <http://www.noiseofthecrowd.com/this-fracking-poll-finding-is-one-of-the-least-convincing-ive-ever-seen/>
3. <http://www.populus.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Heathrow-Borough-Poll-March-2014.pdf>
4. http://www.richmond.gov.uk/100000_say_no_to_heathrow_expansion
5. [http://mediacentre.heathrowairport.com/Press-releases/9-in-10-MPs-who-back-a-third-runway-at-Heathrow-think-it-would-get-parliamentary-approval-9b8.aspx ...](http://mediacentre.heathrowairport.com/Press-releases/9-in-10-MPs-who-back-a-third-runway-at-Heathrow-think-it-would-get-parliamentary-approval-9b8.aspx...)