

Heathrow Consultation – summary from HACAN



The consultation covers a number of topics:

- Runway Alternation
- Airspace changes
- Westerly Preference
- Night Flights
- Extra flights in advance of a third runway

All the proposals assume a third runway will be built.

The consultation runs from 8th January to 4th March.

The full consultation document can be found at: <http://hacan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Heathrow-Airspace-and-Future-Operations-Consultation-document-Final-low-res.pdf>

The list of venues where there will be an exhibition:
<http://afo.heathrowconsultation.com>

You can respond:

- Online via www.heathrowconsultation.com
- Via email at feedback@heathrowconsultation.com
- By writing to Freepost, LHR AFO Consultation

1. Runway Alternation

At present when planes land over London they switch runways at 3pm to allow people in West London a half day's break from the noise. If a third runway is built that break would be reduced to a third.

The consultation is asking for people's views on how this should happen: for example, do you prefer entire days with planes and then entire days without them or would you go for a period of respite each day.

At present when planes land from the west there is no runway alternation. Planes land all-day long over Windsor on the northern runway. The proposal is that, if a third runway is built, this will change and the pattern will be the same as will be introduced for planes landing over London, giving Windsor some respite for the first time.

For details on runway alternation, see pages 15-21 of the consultation document

2. Airspace Changes

Even if Heathrow remained a two runway airport, there would be changes to its airspace. Across the world air traffic controllers are moving from ground-based systems to a satellite-based one to guide planes in and out of airports.

This will result in narrower, more precise flight paths. These will save airlines' time and fuel, should cut the CO2 emissions from each aircraft and improve the resilience of airports.

Precise, narrow flight paths mean concentration. In order to avoid concentrated all-day flying over communities, Heathrow is proposing to introduce a number of precise flight paths and rotate them.

This is what they are calling airspace alternation in their consultation document. This will apply to areas a bit further away from Heathrow and also to departing flights. At this stage they don't know where these new routes will be but they have included maps of areas that might have one or more of these routes.

This is where Heathrow talk about 'winners and losers'. The losers would be people who might be under a flight path for the first time. The winners would be the communities who have been plagued by all-day flying for decades and who very much welcome some respite from the noise.

It appears Heathrow will coordinate airspace alternation with whatever plans they settle on for runway alternation for those closest to the airport.

For an overview on airspace alternation, see pages 22-24 of the consultation document.

But for more detail on how the proposals might affect your area go to:

<https://afo.heathrowconsultation.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/01/3649-HRW-3R-A3-maps-booklet-AW-update-2-V1.pdf> **But note** not all postcodes impacted seem to show up so best to look at the diagrams as well.

3. Westerly Preference

Aircraft usually need to land and take off into the wind. In a typical year in London a west wind blows about 70% of the time. This is when planes land from the east over London and take off to the west. But there is a catch. When there is a slight east wind of up to 5 knots, planes still land over London. This is known as westerly preference.

The consultation is asking whether people would prefer:

Westerly Preference to be retained

Easterly Preference to be introduced instead (meaning fewer landings over London; more over Berkshire; and people who get departures when there is an east wind would get more of them)

No Preference is introduced (would particularly benefit the areas of SE London which are currently overflowed by both Heathrow and London City planes when a slight east wind is blowing as City operates no preference)

Managed Preference – this seems to be Heathrow’s preferred option: “we are thinking of moving to a ‘managed’ preference which would involve changing the direction of arriving and departing aircraft based on a set of criteria or rules designed to limit overall noise effects on communities and to help deliver periods of relief for them.”

For an overview on airspace alternation, see pages 27-29 of the consultation document.

4. Night Flights

When in June Parliament voted to give Heathrow permission to draw up plans for a third runway, it stipulated that it must provide a six and a half hour break at night from scheduled flights – up from 5 hours at present.

Heathrow is asking for views on the hours when that break should take place. This includes the option of starting flights as early as 5.30am but only on one runway so communities under the other two get nothing until 6am. This pattern could then be alerted week by week or even day by day.

At present departures don’t start until 6.20am (all the early aircraft are arrivals). The consultation doesn’t say whether Heathrow proposes to change the time of the first departure. I suspect this is unlikely because these early morning departures are often used by passengers arriving on the night flights.

For details on night flights, see pages 30-36 of the consultation document

4. Extra flights in advance of a third runway

Heathrow wants to bring in an extra 25,000 flights a year on the existing runways before any third runway opens. This is known as Independent Parallel Approaches (or “IPA”).

At present Heathrow is allowed to land a small number of planes on the ‘wrong’ runway, i.e. out of alternation, if delays are building up. Between 7pm and 11pm, this currently amounts to 15 a day.

For the hour between 6am and 7am when Heathrow has always been allowed to use both runways for landings there are currently 16/18 flights an hour landing on the ‘departures’ runway.

The problem Heathrow has right now is that two planes can’t land on parallel runways at the same time. This means that, in order to allow a plane to land on the ‘wrong’ runway, the gap between planes landing on the other runway has to be extended, thus reducing overall capacity.

IPA is an attempt to get round this. New direct flight paths will be introduced from 3 of the 4 holding stacks (Biggin Hill being the exception) to the airport for planes coming in on the new runway.

At this stage we don't know where these flight paths will be. Heathrow expects the number of planes using these new flight paths will be limited: in total no more than 40 a day and probably less than 15 after 7am; with no more than 25 an hour between 6am and 7am.

For more details on Independent Parallel Approaches:

<https://afo.heathrowconsultation.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2018/12/Making-better-use-of-our-existing-runways-Final-low-res.pdf>

A new feature of this consultation is that you can enter your postcode and see how any of these changes might affect you: <http://hacan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Heathrow-Airspace-and-Future-Operations-Consultation-document-Final-low-res.pdf>

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John Stewart
Chair HACAN

9th January 2019