

The Report



An Interim Pot Stirrer

On Tuesday, the Airports Commission, chaired by Sir Howard Davies, issued its interim report. Davies has an unenviable task. Politicians don't, as a rule, like airport expansion. For every vote they gain by plumping for airport expansion, they'll lose at least one other. That's because, more than any other development, airports have such a great impact on people's lives. There's the noise factor: rates of strokes and heart disease *have been shown* to increase with people's proximity to Heathrow. And there is the distortion and congestion of transport networks that blight areas for tens of miles around.

Yesterday's *interim report* from the commission has nudged the debate forward. It has plumped for one more runway at either Heathrow or at Gatwick. It shies away from Boris Johnson's Thames estuary hub, which would entailed the rewiring the transport and economic infrastructure of the South East, but doesn't quite rule it out. That's because this is above all a political report. It is designed to keeping the existing major players happy; Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted and Birmingham have all praised it.

It could have been worse for those that have desires for an airport east of London. Boris Johnson met with transport secretary Patrick McLoughlin *last Thursday* and Howard Davies *on Monday* in a bid to ensure that the estuary project was not excluded. He has *threatened court action* if his pet project is not one of the options. David Cameron is also reported to have met Howard Davies *last Wednesday* to press for a non-Heathrow option to be included in the recommendations.

Communities, heritage and the countryside feature little in this report. It is written around an assumption that communities can be bulldozed and that householders' only concern about this will be property prices. Try telling that to the communities in Harmondsworth, Sipson, Richmond and elsewhere. The commission does at least recognise that international environmental protections will limit the Mayor of London's ambitions in the Thames.

This debate still has eighteen months to run. That means that airport expansion looks set to feature strongly at the next election, at least in the South East. It could be sooner if Zac Goldsmith decides to force a byelection over wavering Tory opposition to a third runway at Heathrow.

Andy Boddington

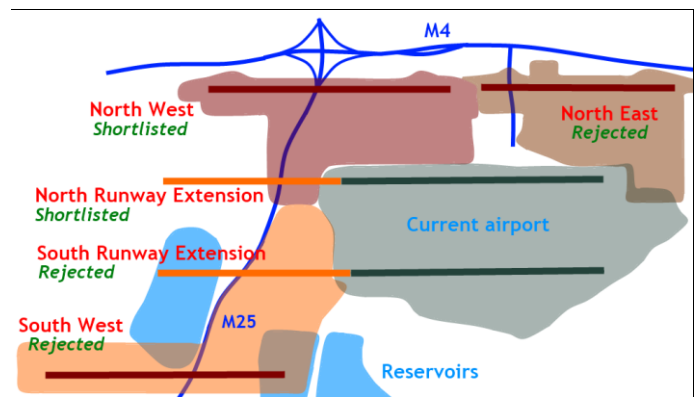
New runways. The Airports Commission's review into airport capacity and connectivity in the UK has concluded that there is a need for one additional runway to be in operation in the south east by 2030 . The commission, chaired by Howard Davies, said that it will be further studying proposals for new runways at:

Gatwick: the airport's proposal for a new runway to the south of the existing runway;

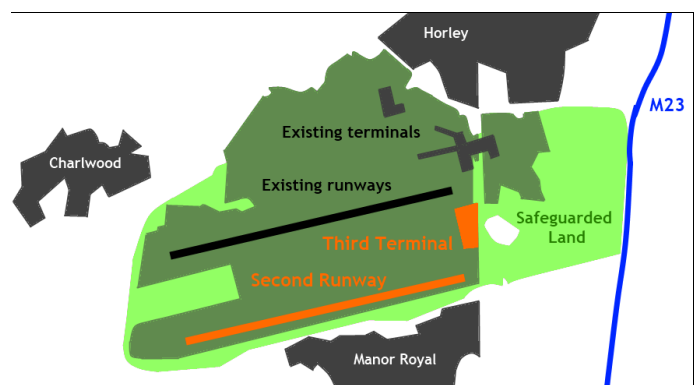
Heathrow: the airport's proposal for one new 3,500m runway to the northwest;

and **Heathrow Hub's** proposal to extend the existing northern runway to at least 6,000m, enabling the extended runway to operate as two independent runways.

The commission says that there are "significant risks" with each of the proposals, which will be assessed during Phase 2 of its work. It will hold a public consultation on the three options in autumn next year. The commission's final report will be published after the 2015 election.



Heathrow winners and losers



Gatwick expansion plans

Thames estuary hub. The commission said proposals for ‘Boris Island’ on the north-east corner of the Isle of Grain show “great imagination and ambition.” It said the benefits could be significant but “complex to access” and environmental constraints present “significant delivery risks.” The airport would require £25 billion of transport improvements: “The scale of road and rail investment and construction activity needed is daunting, at a time when HS2 is also under way.” It says that London City and Southend airports would have to close because of airspace limitations, and this would reduce competition. The commission will, however, carry out further analysis of the Isle of Grain option in early 2014.

Ruled out. The commission rejects a five runway hub at Stansted, saying it would lead to reduced capacity at other airports due to a clash of flight paths. It said Birmingham or Stansted might be considered for a second new runway to be built by 2050 [L]. An expanded Northolt is not an option due to congestion on connections to Heathrow and the difficulties in lengthening the runway. Proposals to increase use of Manton and Lydd airports, and a scheme to construct a new airport on the Goodwin Sands off Deal were also rejected. Use of Cardiff airport for long haul flights has been ruled out [BBC]. The commission agrees a “congestion charge” on airports operating at above 90% capacity would move air traffic out of the South East, but dismisses the option because it will not increase capacity. It says that a change to the slots regime – where airlines are allocated slots and can trade them – is not possible due to international treaty obligations.

Table 6.1: New runways may have impacts on system capacity

Potential airspace impacts of proposals on London and SE airport capacity³¹

Expansion options	Impact on other airports				
	LHR	LGW	STN	LTN	LCY
Heathrow 3rd runway	↑	→	→	→	→
Gatwick 2nd runway	→	↑	→	→	→
Stansted 2nd runway	→	→	↑	↓	→
Isle of Grain Hub	⊘	→	→	→	⊘
Stansted Hub	↓	→	↑	↓	↓

Impact of runways on other airports
(Heathrow, Gatwick, Stansted, Luton, London City)

Operations. The commission complained of an “inertia in industry and political processes that has inhibited the implementation” of strategies to improve the operational efficiency of airports and airspace. It wants more flights from Heathrow to take off to the east to give the Windsor area a respite from noise. Additional flights should also be allowed between 5.00am and 6.00am. It has partly rejected mixed mode operation at Heathrow, in which both runways would be used for take-off and landing at the same time, saying it would lead to a lack of noise respite for people under flight paths. But, it says, mixed mode might be used tactically when arrival delays of 10 minutes or more arise and may become part of a “transition strategy to the preferred longer-term option.” The commission also calls for the establishment of an Independent Aviation Noise Authority to provide advice about the noise impacts of aviation.

The Reaction

Reaction: Political. Howard Davies refused to deny that he had been under political pressure to include options beyond Heathrow and Gatwick on the shortlist. Others described the report as a “political fudge” [g i itv]. The BBC predicted that the report will create political turmoil in the run up to the 2015 election [BBC]. Zac Goldsmith said it would be “catastrophic” for David Cameron if he supported a third runway. He called for residents to make one last push against the “truly appalling” news [BBC VLG]. He repeated his promise to trigger a by-election in his Richmond Park constituency if his party drops its opposition to a third Heathrow runway [BBC]. Vince Cable, business secretary and MP for Twickenham, said the report: “Puts Heathrow at the front of its thinking which is questionable economically, damaging environmentally and probably undeliverable politically” [VLG]. Lib Dem treasury secretary Danny Alexander repeated his party’s opposition to expansion of Heathrow. Shadow transport secretary Mary Creagh welcomed the report but declined to back any of the shortlisted options [BBC]. Labour is denying that it has done a u-turn or softened its stance against a third Heathrow runway [g FT]. Ahead of the report, Louise Ellman, chair of the Commons transport committee rejected a Thames estuary hub and urged expansion at Heathrow [M].

Reaction: Boris Johnson. On Monday, Johnson met Howard Davies in an eleventh hour attempt to promote and estuary airport or expansion of Stansted [ES]. After the commission’s report was published, Johnson said the good news is that the Thames estuary option is “not dead yet”. He called on Cameron to stop “pussy-footing” and make a decision. He said a third runway at Heathrow would be “completely crackers”, adding: “There will be more pigs flying than aircraft if we are to believe the claim that three runways at Heathrow will make less noise than two” [g M] [M]. Johnson also declared that “a new airport in the inner estuary is the only credible hub option left” [itv].

Reaction: Aviation. Heathrow welcomed the report, saying: “A third runway is the quickest, cheapest and surest way of connecting the UK to growth.” It complained the decision-making process is taking too long. Heathrow plans to consult next year to help develop its third runway proposals in more detail [X]. Lobby group Heathrow Hub said it was “delighted” the north runway might be extended. It said it hadn’t abandoned hopes of also lengthening the south runway [X]. Gatwick welcomed the report and said: “The real debate starts now, not least on the environmental impacts and business case of each option” [X]. Stansted welcomed “the Commission’s finding that Stansted is one of the viable options for a runway beyond 2030” [X L]. Birmingham Airport also said it is pleased with the report [X]. The owners of Lydd Airport on Dungeness were less keen and said the report: “presents a potentially misleading picture of the potential for development at Lydd” [L]. No frills airlines were also unhappy. easyJet said that hub airports are out-dated and the demand is for point to point services [L]. Michael O’Leary of Ryanair said that the market, not the government or “political interference”, should decide where new runways are built [T].

Reaction: Environmental. Georgia Wrighton, Director of CPRE Sussex said: “A second runway at Gatwick... would concrete over cherished open countryside. A heady cocktail of increased flights, HGVs and cars would erode the tranquillity of rural communities, and the health and quality of life of people living under its shadow. The national obsession with expansion will land a disaster on the countryside whilst making runaway climate change unstoppable” [RE](#) [C](#). The WWF said that that airport expansion is completely incompatible with the UK Climate Change Act [A](#). Friends of the Earth said the South East doesn’t need aviation expansion [O](#). The RSPB said: “We have always said that the Thames Estuary is a disastrous place to put an airport. It supports many thousands of wintering birds and other wildlife... However, climate change remains the greatest long-term threat to wildlife” [RSPB](#). CPRE has not issued a statement.

Reaction: London. The Guardian and Independent reported that communities around Heathrow are gearing up for a new battle [G](#) [I](#). John Stewart, chairman of HACAN said the report is a “stitch up.” He said: “Davies has been clear that Heathrow will be where most of the expansion will take place. But Heathrow will be the most difficult, as the opposition to the plans is huge.” He warned that the report will be the trigger for a “massive campaign” in 2014 [L](#) [A](#). Lord True, leader of Richmond council said the report fails to consider any visionary alternative to the problem of Heathrow: “We will use all measures available to us to block any proposals” [SWL](#) [YLG](#). Leader of Wandsworth Council Ravi Govindia said: “This is about as bad as it could be” [L](#). The leader of Hillingdon Council, Ray Puddifoot called on David Cameron to keep to his promise not to build a third runway or face losing his credibility [L](#). Brentford and Isleworth Tory MP Mary Macleod accused the commission of not listening to local people and said she would be “disappointed” if her party backed Heathrow expansion [GB](#). The GLA Conservative transport spokesman said: “I regret that the Davies’ Commission has not taken the opportunity to rule out any expansion of Heathrow” [A](#). Richmond Lib Dems have reiterated their opposition to Heathrow expansion [S](#). A “Say no to Heathrow expansion” petition has been launched [L](#).

Reaction: Heathrow villages. A north-west runway would wipe Harmondsworth and Longford off the map. Around 950 homes facing compulsory purchase and demolition. Harmondsworth’s 14th century Great Barn, and St Mary’s Church are also under threat. The residents of Sipson would be spared demolition but be overflowed at the tip of the runway. Jane Taylor, chair of the Sipson Residents’ Association said people were weary of fighting to protect their homes but still had “a lot of determination and grit” [BBC](#). Peter Hood, chairman of Colnbrook parish council expressed surprise at the option to extend Heathrow’s north runway westwards: “This one was a bit of an oddball. We didn’t see it coming” [G](#). Harmondsworth residents said the Heathrow proposals would have a “devastating effect” on their lives [ES](#). The village of Stanwell Moor would have been flattened by the south-west Heathrow option. Kathleen Croft, chair of Stanwell Moor Residents Association, said: “If they can extend the northern runway there’s nothing to say that they won’t come back and... extend the southern runway too” [ES](#).

Reaction: Thames estuary hub. After the Isle of Grain was left in the running, former transport minister Paul Clark said it was a “grave day for the people of Medway.” George Crozer from Friends of the North Kent Marshes said: “I’m unhappy that the people of Grain are left with the Sword of Damocles hanging over them” [KO](#). The Deputy Leader of Labour Group on Kent County Council said of the Thames estuary hub: “It is time for this nonsense to be put to rest” [itv](#). The leader of Kent County Council, Paul Carter, said: “We will continue to express 101 very good reasons why the Isle of Grain is not a viable option” [KN](#).

Reaction: Gatwick. Brendon Sewill of the Gatwick Area Conservation Campaign said it would be a mistake to see expansion of Gatwick as an easy option. “It’s not just a runway, it’s the industrialisation of Sussex. It’s not just a strip of concrete: we’re talking about changing the character of a part of England that people hold dear... Now the spotlight is on Gatwick the next step will be to examine the runway plans in detail, and it will be found that Gatwick is an unsuitable site” [G](#) [ES](#) [C](#). Horsham MP Francis Maude expressed his disappointment: “Building a second runway would have huge environmental impacts, with noise pollution the biggest. It would place enormous pressure on the existing infrastructure which is already under stress” [WST](#). Crawley MP Henry Smith was more cautious and said Gatwick: “must clearly demonstrate how it would manage and mitigate the impact on the Crawley area, including a comprehensive plan for upgrading local infrastructure” [L](#). Nils Pratley: “Gatwick should win in a shoot-out with Heathrow” [G](#). Faisal Islam: “Gatwick: the dark horse for airport expansion” [4](#).

Reaction: Stansted. County council leader David Finch said: “We said that a four runway super airport at Stansted was unviable and unwanted. Davies has listened to us... We said that a second runway at Stansted may be inevitable but not for decades. Davies has listened to us” [L](#). Uttlesford District Council said it is relieved the Stansted hub proposal has been dropped: “Further runways at Stansted would have a significant impact on the environment and the lives of our residents” [L](#). Stop Stansted Expansion welcomed the report and said: “We must now show solidarity with the communities around Heathrow and Gatwick and support their efforts in resisting the threat that they now face” [itv](#) [L](#) [L](#).

Reaction: Regional. West Midlands MPs said they were disappointed that the commission did not recognise that High Speed 2 will make Birmingham Airport a viable contender for expansion [L](#) [L](#) [L](#). Bristol Airport said that regional airports could take the short haul load way from London [L](#).

The CPRE eBulletins

CPRE South East eBulletin is independently written and edited by Andy Boddington: cprenews@andybodderson.co.uk. Views expressed in the eBulletin and its editorial approach are those of its editor and not any part of CPRE.

Subscribe to regular copies of this eBulletin [RE](#) (it’s free).

CPRE London eBulletin [RE](#). Free subscription.

CPRE Buckinghamshire eBulletin [RE](#).