



To: The Right Honourable George
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Dear George

The Airports Commission began its work in November 2012 and will produce its interim report by the end of this year. Our emerging conclusions are that the UK airports sector is experiencing worsening capacity constraints, which are already affecting performance at Heathrow Airport. These constraints are expected to become more widespread over the coming decades, particularly at airports in the South East of England.

In our interim report we will explore some operational changes which will allow the nation to make better use of existing airport capacity in the short term. We will also produce a shortlist of options for additional runway capacity in the longer term, which we will examine in more detail in the second phase of our work. All of those longer term options will inevitably take a substantial period of time to plan and build, even if political consensus in support of our recommendations can be secured. We therefore face a period, probably of a decade or more, before any significant new infrastructure can be brought on line to alleviate the capacity constraints facing the sector.

In the interim there is a strong case for attaching a greater strategic priority to transport investments which improve surface access to our airports. Surface transport improvements can encourage more use of airports which currently have spare capacity, improve the passenger experience, and make airports more attractive to airlines. Clearly, the needs of other users of the transport network must be considered, and we have taken them into account in reaching our recommendations, which in many cases would deliver substantial and wider positive impacts and benefits. However, for the foreseeable future, some greater weight should be placed on the needs of existing airports and their users when taking decisions on transport investment.



There are also environmental benefits to be gained through surface access investment. If we are to reconcile the twin objectives of meeting aviation capacity needs and remaining on course to meet the UK's environmental goals, we need to do more to support a shift towards the use of public transport, particularly rail. Of the airports serving London and the South East, only Stansted has broken significantly above the level of 40% of its passengers using public transport for their journey to or from the airport (largely on the basis of coach traffic). While the overall picture of London's modal split is comparable to many major European airports, it lags well behind the leading airports, such as Schiphol.

We recognise that some important surface access improvements are already planned for UK airports, for example at Heathrow a combination of Crossrail, Western Rail Access and M25 enhancements will provide significant additional capacity and journey time savings. The Northern Hub should provide Manchester Airport with the largest improvement in its surface access for a generation. The Birmingham Gateway development will improve the experience of many passengers travelling to and from Birmingham Airport. There are other, smaller projects, such as the planned platform enhancement at Gatwick Airport Station. We firmly support all these schemes.

However, there is room to go further. Even modest enhancements to road and rail links take some time to bring on stream. We are therefore writing to you ahead of the Autumn Statement, to encourage you to consider schemes specifically related to airport access in the context of your future spending plans. Where we are making recommendations, we have done as much as possible to develop them to a level that will allow for swift implementation. That said, we recognise that in some cases further work will need to be done on defining the nature of the scheme and assessing its costs and benefits by the relevant transport authority, be it Network Rail, the Highways Agency or the Department for Transport.

Our present recommendations on surface access make sense whatever the eventual choice of longer term option may be. We have not put forward any proposals which could only be justified in the circumstances of particular decisions on new airport capacity. We will return to those options as part of the second phase of our work.

Our recommendations are set out in detail in the annex to this letter. In particular, we are recommending a significant upgrade of the station at Gatwick Airport, beyond the works which are already planned, the cost of which could be in the region of £180m. We are also recommending urgent studies into increasing the capacity and improving the quality of the rail service between London and Stansted Airport, and to provide rail access into Heathrow from the south. We have not made specific recommendations on the various proposals that have been put to us in relation to smaller and regional airports, but we would emphasise that serious consideration should be given to airport users when determining priorities for local transport spending.



If the works we have recommended were to be delivered in full, that would amount to more than £2bn of investment. The proposals have different timescales for implementation, for some the work could start immediately while others require further development. Those options which we have identified where work could begin now are likely to cost in the region of £200m.

I know that you are aware of the need to make progress in strengthening our airport infrastructure. The economic importance of such development is high, and will become even greater as the economy recovers. While a final decision on new runway capacity will await a new government, a package of measures on the lines we recommend here could help to bridge the gap.

We therefore hope you will give serious consideration to these recommendations as you prepare your Autumn Statement.

Yours ever

Howard

Sir Howard Davies, Chair

Annex – Recommendations on short term surface transport measures

Gatwick

Recommendation 1: *The Government should work with Network Rail and Gatwick Airport to implement a significant enhancement of the airport station, with an emphasis upon making the station more accessible to users with luggage (which should also enhance access for users with disabilities). The Government should pursue an ambitious (circa £180m) option for enhancing the station through the construction of a new concourse and ticket hall with enhanced access to platforms, subject to the airport providing an appropriate contribution to the costs of the scheme.*

Recommendation 2: *There is a need to improve the suitability of the Gatwick Express rolling stock to make it more suitable for airport users, for example by the provision of additional luggage space. The Government should take opportunities to enhance it where they exist in the franchising system.*

Recommendation 3: *The Government should work with train operators to promote the introduction of paperless ticketing facilities for journeys to and from Gatwick Airport station.*

Recommendation 4: *The Government and Network Rail should accelerate work to produce a detailed plan for the enhancement of the Brighton Main Line, with a particular emphasis upon enhancing capacity and reliability, so as to accommodate growth in both airport and commuter traffic. This could focus on the alleviation of particular pinch points (such as East Croydon).*

Recommendation 5: *The Government should work with the Highways Agency to develop a forward route strategy for the sections of the motorway network connecting to Gatwick Airport, with a particular emphasis on the connections between the M25, M23 and the airport itself. This strategy should consider options for expanding the slip-roads between the roads in question, which could become substantial congestion pinch points.*

Since the sale of Gatwick Airport, its new management has sought to increase the number of long haul destinations served by the airport and has already achieved some successes in this area. In light of the capacity constraints at Heathrow, we believe that the UK's interests, in the window until any new capacity can be brought online, lie in enabling passengers to more effectively access Gatwick's increasing connections to new markets, as well as its existing route network. This is reflected in our recommendations.

We have also recognised the other pressures that exist upon the surface access links serving Gatwick; particularly the Brighton Main Line. We understand that this limits the extent to which the airport's surface access might be improved in the short to medium term; London must remain open for business for residents and commuters, as well as for international travellers.

However, we believe that there are some works that can be done, particularly in terms of taking further the planned enhancements to the airport's station. The station is not, at present, well suited to the needs of airport users. Its

configuration is poor, particularly for passengers with luggage who are forced to wait for the rather inadequate lifts provided or else struggle with their bags on narrow escalators. This does not provide the best welcome to international visitors or send the message that the airport is well suited to long haul airlines and their customers.

In respect of the further enhancement of the airport station, we believe there is a strong case for taking forward a significant programme of improvements (costed at £180m in 2008), which would completely replace the existing concourse and ticket hall with a new facility. We believe that represents the best means of enhancing the passenger experience at Gatwick and hence the airport's ability to attract new long haul routes.

We have also reviewed a more modest scheme with costs below £50m, which would focus on improvements to the platforms and some modest refurbishment of the existing concourse and ticket hall. We do not believe that this would offer an attractive solution. However, since the airport itself would be a substantial beneficiary of the work, we recommend that the implementation of the more ambitious proposal should be subject to it making an appropriate contribution to the overall cost.

Ticketing facilities at the station are also poor and the range of tickets and fares available can be confusing. We have noted the London Assembly Transport Committee's proposal that Oyster facilities be provided at Gatwick Airport Station. We support this, but also note that paperless ticketing systems are rapidly evolving. We therefore recommend that Gatwick station be incorporated as soon as possible into the Oyster system or any successor.

The Gatwick Express service forms a key part of the airport's surface transport offering, but we are concerned that it faces a number of challenges in supporting the airport's connectivity growth. These challenges arise largely from a lack of capacity on the Brighton Main Line, but there are also clear reasons to suspect that the rolling stock's configuration is not ideal for an airport express service. We also need to recognise that while Gatwick Airport Station and the Gatwick Express are used by a number of commuters as well as airport users, the primary purpose of these facilities is to support the airport. We believe that the configuration of both the station and the rolling stock needs to reflect this.

In respect of the studies into future enhancement of the Brighton Main Line and the M25 and M23, my understanding is that Government, Highways Agency and Network Rail would, in any event, have needed to undertake this work before too long, due to the growing demands and pressures on the infrastructure. Our recommendations, therefore, should be seen as a call for the acceleration of this work and for due consideration to be given for the needs of airport users. I believe that the costs of the respective studies should not exceed £1m each.

Stansted

We received many proposals regarding the railway line between Stansted and London. The airport has announced plans to increase passenger numbers on the basis of ambitious deals with major low cost carriers, the long (and often unreliable) journey times on the Stansted Express remain a deterrent to full service carriers looking at the potential for using the airport.

There appear to be substantial strategic arguments in favour of enhancing this link. The line is used not only by airport passengers, but also by London commuters and Cambridge travellers. All of these pressures upon the line are set to grow, particularly in light of the London Mayor's Development Plan, which envisions substantial housing and business growth along the Lea Valley. The most commonly proposed solution to this problem is the 4-tracking of the line between Copper Mill Junction and Broxbourne Junction. The costs of this proposal are high but it is clear that the case for investing merits urgent consideration.

Recommendation 6: The Government should work with Network Rail and Transport for London on a detailed study of the route between London and Stansted Airport and serious consideration should be given to 4-tracking the line as far as Broxbourne Junction, subject to a robust business case being developed. This study should consider how enhancements to the route might benefit airport traffic, London commuters and Cambridge traffic, recognising that any steps to enhance the Stansted Express service through regularising or reducing journey times and improving reliability will help the airport to play an enhanced role in supporting London and the UK's international connectivity. The study should take full account of the Mayor's London Growth Strategy.

Recommendation 7: The Government, Network Rail and Train Operators should work together on options to connect Stansted Airport to a wider range of London destinations, with a particular emphasis on making better use of the connection facilities available at Stratford domestic station

Recommendation 8: The Government should work with train operators to promote the introduction of paperless ticketing facilities for journeys to and from Stansted Airport station.

Recommendation 9: The Government and the Highways Agency should monitor road congestion around Stansted Airport, with a view to making interventions should substantial congestion arise as traffic at the airport grows.

In respect of costs, I believe that both recommendations 6 and 7 could be accommodated within a single study with a budget of less than £1m. The cost of their eventual output, however, could be far higher. On the evidence available to us at present, I believe that the cost of the 4-tracking to Broxbourne Junction could be in the region of £800m. This is why it is vital that more work is done to establish the precise nature of the scheme, the business case it rests upon and how any new capacity generated might best be used to serve each of the markets that depends upon the line.

Recommendation 8 could be incorporated into the wider roll-out of paperless ticketing across the network which is already underway and need not have a substantial cost above and beyond this roll-out. As with the equivalent recommendation in respect of Gatwick, we have not specified the technology that should be used to deliver this recommendation.

Heathrow

Heathrow airport is already operating close to its capacity limit and that its ability to open routes to new markets is constrained by that lack of spare capacity. In addition, there are works already in progress, notably Crossrail and Western Rail Access, which will bring huge improvements to the quality of Heathrow's surface access.

However, we remain concerned that the proportion of users (particularly workforce) accessing Heathrow using private cars remains high, with consequent implications for air quality around the airport. We therefore think that there is a case for plugging the remaining gaps in the airport's rail access, which are primarily to the south.

This problem has been recognised before and a proposed remedy was sought through the Airtrack scheme. This would have provided a rail link into the airport from Guildford, Reading and London Waterloo. However, the scheme was cancelled due to concerns over its cost (£673m) and its impact upon local transport networks, particularly level crossings in a number of towns along the route (some of which would only have been open for a few minutes in each hour). Since then, a separate proposal (Airtrack Lite) has been put forward which attempts to alleviate some of these issues.

We think there is a case to look again at rail access to Heathrow from the South. This may involve revisiting the Airtrack proposal or developing fresh ideas. Accordingly, in respect of Heathrow, we recommend:

Recommendation 10: Recognising the importance of encouraging modal shift towards more environmentally sustainable forms of transport at Heathrow, not only for supporting future expansion plans but also for optimising the airport's operations within its current capacity constraints, the Government should work with Network Rail to undertake a detailed study to find the best option for enhancing rail access into Heathrow from the south. Initial indications are that up to roughly 15% of Heathrow's passengers in the London and South East region could benefit from improved Southern Access.

Our understanding is that this study would require some time to do its work, although its budget would likely be less than £1m. Its eventual recommendations may have a cost of several £100ms, but a full study will bring a better understanding of the costs and benefits of the options in this area.

Manchester

The Northern Hub will bring extremely significant improvements to the quality of Manchester's rail surface access, as well as to wider rail connectivity across the North West. By providing more opportunities for direct rail journeys through the centre of Manchester and providing additional platforms at Manchester Airport Station, this significant programme of improvements to the rail network in the North West will make public transport a more convenient and accessible option for reaching the airport, including for travellers from Leeds and Sheffield. We believe that with the Northern Hub, Manchester Airport should remain well placed to serve its customers for the foreseeable future.

We have, however, noted a number of submissions advising us of problems of road congestion around the airport. We acknowledge that, just as Heathrow airport is not by itself the chief cause of congestion on the M25, so too much of the congestion around Manchester airport is driven by commuter rather than airport traffic. However, we believe that the situation should be kept under review, so that swift action can be taken if congestion starts to have a real impact upon road users' ability to access the airport. We therefore recommend:

Recommendation 11: *The Government should continue its support for the Northern Hub and ensure that the project is completed in full.*

Recommendation 12: *The Government and the Highways Agency should monitor road congestion around Manchester Airport, with a view to making interventions should substantial congestion arise.*

Other Airports

We received a significant number of submissions relating to surface access at other airports. In some cases, work is already underway on schemes that will improve their surface access; for example, the Birmingham Gateway project, which will renovate and refurbish Birmingham New Street station as well as its surroundings, will substantially improve the experience of passengers travelling to Birmingham Airport via Birmingham New Street.

In the case of Glasgow Airport, we noted the previous funding difficulties associated with the Glasgow Airport Rail Link and accept that the scheme is unlikely to be delivered in the short or medium term. However, we note that the airport remains relatively poorly served by public transport, considering its size and importance to the region.

In respect of many of the other proposals for enhanced surface access to regional airports, we must accept that the Airports Commission is not the body best placed to comment upon the costs and benefits of what are, in essence, local transport schemes. However, we are clear that whatever decisions we make about the provision of new airport capacity in the longer term, regional airports will continue to play an important role in serving their local markets. We would therefore urge local and national transport planning authorities to

give consideration to the needs of airport users in reaching decisions on local transport funding priorities.

Our recommendations in respect of other airports are:

Recommendation 13: *The Government should continue its support for the Birmingham Gateway project and ensure that the scheme is fully delivered.*

Recommendation 14: *The Government and the Highways Agency should develop a comprehensive strategy for motorway access to Luton, with a particular view to examining the case for enhancements to M1 Junction 10A.*

Recommendation 15: *Recognising the past difficulties involved with the Glasgow Airport Rail Link, the Commission continues to believe that there is a need for improved public transport access to the airport. In the short term, the Commission recommends that the Scottish Executive develop enhanced bus links to the airport. However, looking beyond this, the Commission would recommend that the Scottish Executive work with Network Rail and other stakeholders to explore other options, including light rail options.*

Recommendation 16: *The Commission is not the appropriate body to reach a view on many of the schemes proposed for improving access to smaller and regional airports. However, the Commission recognises the importance of allowing these airports to serve their local markets effectively and encourages central Government to work with local authorities and local enterprise partnerships to ensure that proper consideration is given to the needs of airport users when prioritising local transport investment.*